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THE MARRIAGE TIE.

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A SON OF SWEDEN.

A Nobel.

FROM THE GERMAN OF
VAN DER VELDE

BY
CHRISTINA TYRRELL,

TRANSLATOR OF
'SUCCESS AND HOW HE WON IT,' 'UNDER A
CHARM,' ETC.

2 Vols., 21s.

REMINGTON & Co., 5, Arundel Street, Strand, W.C.

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

From the German of

JOHANNES VON DEWALL.

BY

K. E. STANTIAL.

‘As gold is tried by the fire
So the heart must be tried by pain.’

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL I.

London :

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Don't say 503 Collect M. Langdon 8 Dec 53

PREFACE.

THAT English people may learn what miseries the Law of Divorce brings, let them read this story from the German.

THE MARRIAGE TIE.



CHAPTER I.

W—— OUT OF SEASON.

‘ Sweet smiling village. . . .

Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms
withdrawn.’



THE MARRIAGE TIE.



CHAPTER I.

W—— OUT OF SEASON.

I AM about to relate an incident in my own life.

In the year 185—, I found myself in W—— (I intentionally conceal the name of this little Electoral residence). I was ill at the time, and, by the advice of my doctor, had gone there for the benefit of the medicinal springs ; afterwards, other and more tender cords riveted me to the little

place, where I remained until the winter was far advanced.

When I arrived at W——, in the middle of September, the season was just at its height. It was unusually beautiful for the time of year, and the place was thronged with strangers, attracted by the baths, the beauty of the scenery, and, more than all, by the gaming-tables.

W—— lies on the great tourist route to Switzerland; it is one of the chief stations between North Germany, Holland, England, and South Germany, and scarcely any one goes by without stopping there. This charming spot, with its lovely surroundings, possesses something of the alluring charm of a siren, who dwells among the vineyards and chestnut groves, and entices the wanderer to his doom.

The jingle of gold is the music which draws so many mortals to their ruin, and shipwrecks them miserably. Nor are fair forms and sparkling eyes wanting to complete the attraction of the scene. Now, indeed . . . Ah, all that is long past! They have become so hypocritically virtuous now. Now the would-be sirens sit in the glittering rooms, devoutly knitting endless stockings, though sighing all the time after those happy bygone days.

At that time W—— numbered about 20,000 inhabitants; it had a princely castle, a theatre, several handsome streets and magnificent parks. The little court lived there all the winter, and always gave strangers so cordial a welcome that W—— was chosen as a favourite winter resort by many distinguished families, and

birds of passage. Such a little court formed at all times a strong point of attraction; it resembled a centre of crystallisation, drawing round itself affinitive particles. It furnished, in winter, many amusements which can generally only be looked for in larger towns. Added to this was the mild climate, the cheapness of living, the comfort, and the pleasant gossip; so that, even during the worst time of the year, the beautiful walks were seldom quite empty, long trains swept the even paths, and little feet in silk stockings pattered by. Thus W—— always preserved a certain *air de fête*, as the old Princess Algarucki used to say, who had gathered around her a small court, to which, eventually, I had the honour of belonging.

When I arrived there, the brilliant sun from a cloudless sky, shone down upon that charming spot ; strains of music floated round from morn till eve ; gay groups thronged the salons, the parks, the gaming-tables ; charming little conveyances overflowed the neighbourhood. But what good was it all to me, an invalid ? I could only see it from my window, and even then at the cost of great pain, or afterwards in a helpless invalid carriage. The universal joy and pleasure were to me depressing, almost insulting, because, in the midst of it all, I was alone and miserable. When at last I recovered, could stand upon my feet, and could share in this joyous life—ah ! kind reader, in the meanwhile the autumn

had come, and all the mirth was hushed. My newly-awakened longings after pleasure and happiness found little satisfaction, for without all was dead—buried in snow!

A piece of Haydn's music was being performed, called the 'Farewell Symphony,' and composed by the great master, if I mistake not, for a special occasion. The orchestra were playing with all their might, and gladdening the ear with the sweet melody. Then, all at once, while the music is going on, one of the violinists quietly rises, shuts his book with a serious air, takes his instrument under his arm, blows out his light, and goes noiselessly away. See, another rises, the music still continuing, packs up his clarionet, extinguishes his light, and

silently, solemnly glides away. One by one all sadly follow—light after light is extinguished; the place becomes darker and darker, more and more lonely; the music becomes weaker and weaker, and the melody dies away in a melancholy wail. It touches the heart with an indescribable feeling of sadness and sorrow; it seems the death-knell of the summer joy, when its time comes to depart, before the approach of grim winter, the stern monarch of snow and ice. Only four now remain of the many performers; these, too, go their way; their lights are extinguished, it is almost dark; at last one alone is left playing in the wide, deserted room. Then suddenly comes a crash . . . the string snaps, the last light flickers, goes out, the

music is silent, a death-like stillness falls upon the scene—all is over—past, dead!

I was often reminded of this ‘Farewell Symphony’ during the following weeks in W——. When I was able to move about freely, the last dance had taken place, the season was being borne to its grave, and I was one of the mourners. There was no music now at the morning draught, one had to take one’s glass of hot vaporous water without its enlivening strains, and without the sight of the pretty, fresh toilettes, and charming faces—the decline had set in. Now, upon the promenade, instead of the gay, many-coloured throng, you only met solitary, old, shivering men, with high cravats and long coats, who peevishly sipped their

prescribed three glasses, or stood before the barometer, engaged in a long discussion as to the state of the weather. Old ladies, too, were there, with false hair and hideous hats ; and asthmatical youths, buttoned up to the chin, who carried their gloves in their pockets, and attempted in vain to assume an interesting air.

These were all that remained of the throng of visitors—these, who for economy's sake arrived at the end of the season, or who were detained on account of their health after others had departed. One took one's morning draught with a shiver, and hurried homewards as quickly as possible. There was nothing to delight the eye, nothing to cause the footsteps to linger. Ennui met one everywhere.

In the parks the dry leaves lay in heaps upon the paths, which formerly were kept as neat as the floor of a lady's boudoir. The autumn wind played and rustled amongst the withered foliage. Ah ! that same wind had swept away all the beauty and grace, all the pleasant gaiety, all the luxury and elegance.

In the wide-spreading grounds were only to be met hypochondriacal old men, and old maids suffering from asthma and ill-temper—quiet, gloomy figures with goloshes and Gampish umbrellas. Only a few weeks ago, when I was still in the invalid chair, what a joyous movement was here, what splendid toilettes, what sparkling eyes, what witty conversation, what gay laughter ! And now ?

Before the electoral palace the swans sit and sleep, dreaming perhaps of better times. All the bright gondolas, round which in the summer they swam in emulation over the broad surface of the water, were drawn to land, and had already commenced their winter in the wooden boathouse. The gilded galley also was gone, in which such a short time ago Prince Allasch and his cavaliers rowed backwards and forwards every evening with those charming sisters of the house of Senzacosta, whose beauty was only equalled by their riches, and whose *recherché* toilettes excited so much envy and admiration.

The fountain no longer played, and under the plane-trees in front of the palace

reigned the stillness of the grave, broken only by the rustling of the yellow leaves performing a weird dance on the bare stems; chairs and benches had been carried away, they were now piled up under shelter, to rest quietly until the bright time came again.

The concert-hall was fastened up with planks of wood, as a protection from the rain and snow during the long winter months. Even the statues were covered up with straw. Why should they be exposed to the wind and storm to charm with their naked beauty the eyes of the few winter guests?

When the bad weather came in November a sort of panic prevailed; all the visitors were eager to take flight before

the approach of the grim enemy. Lines of carriages carried away the departing ones to the railway or the steamboat, and carts, piled up with their luggage, clattered noisily along behind. The hotels put on winter attire ; curtains were drawn before the windows ; the *table d'hôte* was deserted ; the throng of waiters were dismissed.

Strange ! I met a man one morning in the street, carrying a little boy in his arms ; he had on slippers and a striped woollen jacket, and was comfortably smoking a short pipe. The man saluted me politely, almost familiarly. I turned round and looked after him ; he seemed not unknown to me. I puzzled my brains afterwards for full half an hour, as I walked up and down the lonely alley, thinking who

it could be. Suddenly it flashed across me, he was the porter of the Golden Rose. But how on earth could one be expected to recognise a man in a short striped jacket, indulging in a father's harmless delight, and smoking the pipe of peace, whom, till now, one had only seen with an immense cocked hat, dressed in a green, gold-embroidered coat, looking like a Russian general, stroking his long black beard with a commanding air !

One thing only remained of all the glory of the summer, the little palace concert and some reunions excepted—the gaming-tables, and the last dregs of the gamblers. In some bad parts of the town, and in some restaurants of doubtful reputation, could be still heard, at certain times, the

ominous clatter of the dominoes. There men who lived by their wits, mostly Frenchmen, spent their days, drinking their *petits verres*, and raising their voices in angry disputes, terminating oftentimes in deadly quarrels.

CHAPTER II.

THE BARONESS VON MASZMANN.

‘A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.’



CHAPTER II.

THE BARONESS VON MASZMANN.

THROUGH the long-deserted streets the autumn wind raged in wild fury, then came winter, bringing snow and ice. It was very cold, but still the sun shone brightly, enticing people with its smile out of the hot rooms to bask in its light and warmth. Upon the pond behind the large harbour glided to and fro the many skaters, while on the bank stood figures wrapped in furs, watching the gay throng.

This last company I frequently joined

for I had made several acquaintances by this time, several of which had ripened into friendships. The circle gradually increased, and one of my countrymen having introduced me to the Princess Algarucki, I found myself well provided for during the winter, as I had also been presented at the Electoral Court.

By chance at that time I became very intimate with the President of the police ; some official business brought us together, and afterwards I frequently met the jovial little man in society, especially at the roulette-table, where he was a player of the first rank. I mention this here, because I shall afterwards have to refer to it.

The Princess had a reception every evening ; she occupied the whole of the

première étage of a private hotel ; she was very pleased, also, if any one paid her a visit in the morning, especially if they brought her a little gossip, or could relate a piquant bit of scandal, or retail a *bon mot*. The good-natured, lively old lady took care that her little court was gathered closely under her wing. We could frequent her salons without constraint, and were always sure to meet interesting people ; handsome, clever men and charming women from the great world. All the visitors who came to W—— passed in review before her, but she only repeated her invitations to those who pleased her, and the old lady had a keen eye, and was rarely at fault. She was very rich, and in secret did much good to the poor ; she

loved cheerfulness and pleasure, was clever and witty without being malicious; she possessed also a precious store of remembrances, for there was scarcely a celebrity whom she had not come across at least once in her many travels, and of whom she could relate some interesting story.

The hospitality in her house was very simple, generally only tea (in cups for the ladies and glasses for the gentlemen) and sandwiches, only on gala days was there anything more. She treated us thus sparingly, not from economy; she did it rather because she knew that luxurious meals attract parasites, as honey the wasps, and that parasites are generally not only vulgar people, but, what is

worse, insufferable bores, whom it is best to keep at a distance.

There was never any lack of intellectual food, of wit and humour, of sparkling conversation among the guests of the Princess. The worshippers of feminine beauty always found something in her salon to attract them; many lost their hearts there, amongst whom was I myself. But it was not in the nature of the Princess to meddle in the affairs of the heart—she ignored them entirely; she knew what an unthankful office it is to play Providence to lovers. But enough of this. To my story.

One of the chief ornaments of the Princess Algarucki's salon was the Baroness Melanie von Maszmann.

The Maszmans were Courlanders; they lived on their estates in the neighbourhood of Mitau. A severe rheumatic attack of the Baron's, which suddenly assumed a dangerous form, was the cause of their coming to W—— so late in the year. They had rooms in the Golden Rose, opposite me, in the immediate vicinity of the fountain, and only separated from me by the little flower-market.

It is too difficult a task to depict so peculiarly lovely a creature as the Frau von Maszmann; her chief attraction consisted not so much in severely classical features as in the expression of her whole countenance. The charm was more in her manner, in her mind, than in anything which pen or pencil could portray. I

would rather, therefore, describe the first impression she made upon me.

It was in November, about the 8th or 9th, I believe ; all the world was hastening with enormous bouquets to Neckar Street, to wish happiness to the Princess on her birthday. I was one of the last of the well-wishers, for a bouquet I had ordered from Frankfort had been delayed, and so I found the salon almost empty when I arrived ; and the few who were left arose to depart as I crossed the threshold. My flowers, they were violets of rare beauty, seemed to find great favour in the eyes of the Princess. With a most winning smile, my friendly patroness gave me her lovely hand to kiss, and said to her companion :

‘ Give the flowers a good place, dear Ellen ; put them quite close to my sofa. I give the preference to the fragrance of violets above all other perfumes ; I love them as tenderly as a child, the dear little blue flowers !’

We chatted for a time of this and that ; then all at once the Princess drew towards her her little jewelled box (out of which she was accustomed to eat sweetmeats all day long), laid her hand upon my arm and said :

‘ I shall see you again this evening, *mon ami*. We will have a lobster *à la Napolitaine*, your favourite dish, and after the meal a little dance. *Je veux que l’on s’amuse ; c’est ma fête aujourd’hui*, Nicolai (this was my Christian name). How is

your mother? Pardon me for not asking for her before. Have you had news lately from home? *À propos*, when you come this evening, you will see a country-woman of yours, a real beauty; I know that you are something of a connoisseur in that line, *méchant que vous êtes!*

The excellent old lady was evidently in a very good humour to-day; she gave me her hand again when I took leave, and as I kissed it respectfully, she touched my forehead with her lips, according to the Russian custom. Her companion, Fräulein von Weber, went with me into the anteroom.

‘Who is this country-woman, Ellen Ivanovna?’ I asked her, with a little natural curiosity.

‘A Baroness Maszmann,’ she answered.

‘And is she really as beautiful as the Princess affirms?’

‘She is charming.’

‘Of what kind of attraction?’

‘Of the most dangerous kind, *le genre sérieux*; but now you must hasten away, that you may return again presently,’ she said, and shut the door.

I hurried down the steps, almost running against the sovereign Prince, who was ascending, followed by his adjutant panting under the weight of an enormous bouquet of camellias, as large as a carriage-wheel.

In the evening I arrived at the Princess’s in better time than before. There

were a great many people there, as I had expected, consisting for the most part of my own countrymen, for at that time there was a large Russian colony in W——.

I began conversing with the young Prince Wendelstein about breeding fish artificially, and had my back turned to the door, in order to be able to admire, at my ease, Hélène Alexandrowska, a young lady from Moscow, who had made a great impression upon me, and to whom, in my somewhat awkward way, I had begun to pay attentions.

Suddenly the Prince touched me, with a significant look ; at the same moment a stillness fell upon the salon ; the rustling and talking abruptly ceased. I turned round, it could only be the Frau von

Maszmann who had caused this interruption ; all eyes were directed to one point. What a charming woman ! A tall, slender figure dressed in dark violet velvet, with dazzling white neck, and above that a small pale countenance, set in a frame of luxuriant black hair, from out of which gazed a pair of large, dark, melancholy eyes, rather near together.

She came alone. She swept through the salon, drawing her long train after her, followed by the looks of all present ; she bent before the Princess, and greeted those in her immediate vicinity with perfect grace. Her looks brightened a little, and her mouth attempted a smile, as the old lady, with a friendly look, stretched out both hands in welcome. An involuntary

murmur of applause at her beauty ran through the salon.

‘Who is she?’ every one asked, and put their heads together behind bouquets and fans.

‘What a lovely creature! How charming she is!’ said the gentlemen.

‘What an air! what an enchanting toilette!’ whispered the ladies.

While all the company was thus agitated I stood absorbed in thought, puzzling my brains in vain to remember where I had seen that form before, for I was certain I did not now meet those eyes for the first time. It was some time before it occurred to me, and then it seemed inconceivable that I had not recognised her immediately.

About eight years ago, I was in Berlin. I was then very young, just completing my legal studies. There, in the house of our ambassador, I met several times the Frau von Maszmann, under another name, radiant in all the charms of early youth, and in all the sunshine of happiness. She had recently been married to a German nobleman, Herr von Gleichen. I could not be mistaken, there could not be another such woman. She had now, I presume, lost her first husband, and had married a second time. Strange, though ! They said her love for her husband almost amounted to idolatry, and he, on his part, entirely reciprocated her affection. Was his loss, then, the cause of that deep melancholy expression on her coun-

tenance? I remembered her first husband very well; he was a handsome man, with dark hair, known for his goodness, and esteemed as much as his lovely wife for great musical talents.

I heard the story at that time, that his wife fell so desperately in love with him and his music, that she braved all the hindrances placed by her family in the way of their union; and in consequence, so they said, was living at variance with them.

Later on in the evening, when the crowd had somewhat lessened, I was introduced to the Baroness. She did not recognise me. I was but an insignificant boy when I met her in Berlin, whom the much-admired lady would scarcely have

noticed. I did not think it advisable at that moment to remind her of old times.

She was still very lovely, perhaps even more so than she was eight years ago, though the shadow of a great sorrow lay upon her features, and seemed to weigh down her whole being. One could not look into those peculiar dark eyes without being struck by them. A feeling of sympathy stole involuntarily into my soul, in spite of her cold, almost repelling, behaviour.

Strange! I remarked, while she was conversing with the Prince, with her back towards me, that amongst the dark luxuriance of her hair was to be seen already one solitary silver streak.

She had married early—she could be only six or seven-and-twenty at the most. What had turned that hair grey before its time ?

Afterwards, while they were dancing, I stood a little on one side and watched the Baroness. I could scarcely take my eyes off her, and sadly neglected my charming partner Hélène Alexandrowska. She had refused to dance round dances, but on the persuasion of the old Prince Wendelstein, consented to take part in a Française. Her dancing was ravishing, in fact, grace itself.

‘No wonder,’ exclaimed a deep voice behind me ; ‘her mother was a Pole, a Brinska. I knew her well ; she was a beauty. I often danced

with her at the Government balls at Kowno.'

I turned round cautiously and saw in the glass behind me two old men, with high cravats and decorations, conversing in an undertone.

'The Russian dishes to-day were excellent,' said the elder of the two, after a short pause.

His stomach was his god, as every one well knew. The Princess had a cook from St. Petersburg.

He took snuff out of a large gold snuff-box, and flicked the grains from his sleeve with his fingers.

'Yes, excellent,' answered the other, somewhat absently. 'But just look at her now—see the grace in every movement: she

is a study for a painter. Sergei Alexandritsch, it even makes my old heart beat, in spite of my sixty years.'

'Sixty years? Well, her husband is not younger than that,' murmured the other one in his beard, and used his pocket-handkerchief with great energy.

'You know him, Sergei?'

'Yes, why not? When I was stationed at Mitau in the garrison, about twenty years ago, I sometimes met him in society. He had landed estates in the neighbourhood, and was considered a clever and intelligent man. He was then a stately, handsome man, unmarried; he must be older than either of us. Suwarrow was much interested in him and would will-

ingly have given him a place in the Government, but he declined.'

'And she — where did he meet his wife?'

'Ah, that I know not. I see her to-day for the first time. He must have married quite late.'

'They say she has been married before. She has quite the eyes of her mother, but is more imposing in figure.'

'Notice the hidden fire in them. That is the woman, Sergei, to inspire a grand passion. But you are looking at something else.'

'Here comes the punch,' answered the old man, and his features began to evince a lively interest.

The other shrugged his shoulders.

‘She must have been very unhappy with her first husband,’ I heard afterwards the Countess Draunfels whisper to the Baroness Zumberg, behind her painted fan.

These ladies were playing Russian whist in the next room, at a kreuzer a point.

The Baroness stopped a moment to take some refreshment, and gave a sharp glance at the old lady.

‘Yes, my dear,’ she resumed; ‘she tormented him so with her jealousy that at last he could bear it no longer, and left her. Koscheloff told me all about it a little while ago; he happened to be in Berlin at the time. The story quite formed the topic of the day—very piquant details—you understand?’

She held her fan before her face and laughed maliciously. The Baroness laughed too, and shrugged her bare, thin shoulders.

‘She looks like it,’ returned the latter, contemptuously ; ‘do you see what strange eyes she has—like a cat? I believe they shine in the dark.’

‘Not quite that, dear Baroness ; they are what the French call *un abîme*—fire covered with ashes—a volcano.’

‘The abominable women!’ indignantly exclaimed the pretty Frau von Baniutin to Ellen Ivanovna. She had heard a part of the foregoing conversation.

‘Pardon me, Countess ; it is your deal,’ interrupted her partner, the Counsellor von Manow, somewhat roughly. She

apologised with an angry look, and the interrupted game was resumed.

In the course of the evening I heard here and there remarks and opinions upon the Frau von Maszmann, more or less friendly, as the case might be. However, they taught me nothing which I did not know before. I learned, to put it shortly, that the first husband of the lady had really left her ; but the reasons assigned for the act were so contradictory that one might safely assume them to be invented, or, at least, greatly exaggerated. Several years later she had married the Baron von Maszmann, a Russian nobleman, much older than herself, who completely idolised his young wife. Her character, every one allowed, was quite

blameless. That hidden fire, which sometimes blazed under the long silken eye-lashes, emitted rays which could kindle, but gave no warmth. Her heart was as cold as ice—an abyss strewn with ashes. Good heavens! what will not people say of a woman young and handsome as the Baroness?

As for me, her look filled my heart with sadness. I had seen her in the May-day of her life, beloved and esteemed; and now her expression was that of a living death, as if in the midst of all the gaiety that surrounded her she felt her beauty, even her whole existence, to be only a burden too heavy to bear.

I observed her frequently at times, when she thought herself unnoticed:

how fixed her eyes became as they wandered far away from the present scene ; how sometimes a deep, painful sigh escaped her. So lovely, and so unhappy ! Poor wife !

During the days which followed, all W—— spoke of nothing but the Frau von Maszmann. Every one was in ecstasies, they literally besieged her, and watched eagerly for a chance of seeing her, and of paying court to her. Poor thing ! she hardly knew how to defend herself from this sudden enthusiasm.

CHAPTER III.

THE SCENE IN THE THEATRE.

‘ Thus to rob a lady
Of her good name, is an infectious sin
Not to be pardoned.’



CHAPTER III.

THE SCENE AT THE THEATRE.

It was very much against her will, I am sure, that Frau von Maszmann became the lion of the season. Every one sought after her so much that, however she might struggle against it, she was insensibly drawn deeper and deeper into the whirlpool of society. A reunion without her was like a flower without fragrance. The court circle was incomplete without her, and at last she allowed herself to be carried along with the stream. And when her

husband was so far recovered that he could accompany her, they were seen everywhere. Serious and melancholy, but lovely to adoration, she appeared at all the entertainments given in her honour.

The Baron was a tall, distinguished-looking man, with clever, energetic features. When the gout did not trouble him he bore his sixty years well. He was evidently pleased when his wife went into society. He wished her to have pleasure, and, in spite of his affliction, accompanied her everywhere, to balls, routs, and even to the theatre. His goodness and kindness towards her were unvarying; he treated her with the greatest affection, and had more the air of a tender father than of a husband.

On account of the rare beauty of the

Baroness, it naturally resulted that much attention was paid her. Several gentlemen fell in love with her at first sight, and the young Count Eisenberg almost lost his small amount of wits for her sake. The behaviour, however, of the young wife was so exemplary, so full of tact and dignity, that malice could not find the smallest handle against her fair fame. When the most captivating man of his time, the elegant B——, sighed in vain at her feet, the sharpest tongues, even those of her former defamers, the ladies Draunfels and Zumberg, allowed that the Baroness was entirely *comme il faut*. The Princess adored her, and all the little world of W—— was full of admiration and curiosity.

In spite of all this excitement the young

Baroness still maintained her grave melancholy air. Only one thing could disperse for a moment the cloud upon her brow, and bring a warmer light to her eyes, a grateful, loving glance at her husband, whose love and tender care of her had indeed something touching in it.

Her boldest admirers found at last that their assaults upon such a heart were in vain—the Baroness was unapproachable. One glance from her dark eyes, one haughty curl of her lip, and the words of the most daring froze upon the tongue, while their eyes sank beneath her gaze.

I lived, as I have already said, just opposite the Golden Rose, where the Maszmanns had taken half the *première étage*; and, in consequence, I saw the

Baroness more frequently than others. I was her neighbour, her *vis-à-vis*.

In her domestic habits she was regularity itself. Every morning when the weather was at all favourable, she went for a long walk at nine o'clock with her little daughter and governess. At twelve she accompanied her husband for a drive in the pony-carriage; later on, as the Baron was now able to walk, she gave him her arm, and led him down the colonnade or the walks of the Palace gardens. She made the walk pleasant by her lively conversation, and watched every footstep with the greatest care.

Sometimes I saw her sitting at the window, occupied with some little feminine work, accompanied by her child, whom

she assisted in her lessons or instructed in needlework.

This child, a maiden of six or seven, was a little cherub, a sweet, gracious creature. She was the delight of my eyes, and I was never tired of looking out of my window to watch the little Nina playing in the garden. I met her also upon the promenade, upon the ice behind the large harbour, where she was taking her first lessons in skating. Between the little white Astracan jacket, and the white hat with a crimson band, shone out her little face, glowing with the active exercise. When she looked up out of her large eyes, she resembled her mother, but *hers* were clear and bright with the innocent joy of childhood, undimmed by a touch of sorrow.

We were very good friends, the little Nina and I ; she smiled when she saw me coming in the distance, and, making me a little curtsey, gave me her hand with a pretty ' Bonjour, monsieur.'

Frau von Maszmann generally dressed in black in the day-time, very elegant but very simple. Only some trifle in her attire, a ribbon or a feather, showed that she was not in mourning.

It was chiefly through my friendship with the child that I came to know the parents. I accompanied them sometimes in their walks, and often took an evening cup of tea with them in their family circle. At my suggestion the Baron came now and then to the little Casino, where one could play a game of cards, or read the newspaper.

He was a clever man, of polished manners, and an excellent companion. He was a true Russian nobleman, tall and stately, with broad shoulders and massive brow, decisive in word and action, with much force of character—a thorough man of honour. His good name and his wife were everything to him. He never spoke of his domestic affairs, but he appeared to be particularly happy in his family, notwithstanding the heavy cloud which overshadowed his wife's brow. I remember once his mentioning, accidentally, that he had been a friend of the Baron von Menghden, his wife's father; and on another occasion, he told me that her parents had unfortunately died very early.

As I have already intimated, I had at that time fallen deeply in love with a young lady. The intimacy had commenced during the season, and the much-dreaded winter passed for me only too quickly. I had eyes only for Hélène von Alexandrowski, upon whom my affections were riveted. As she plays no prominent *rôle* in this history, I will renounce my desire to draw her portrait for the reader, as if I attempted it, he would accuse me of exaggeration. I was drawn more and more towards the star which attracted me, and on that account, my watchfulness over Frau von Maszmann became considerably lessened.

Even in a salon or a ball-room, lovers are as good as alone ; they have eyes only

for one another, and all other people seem to them nothing but lay figures.

I met the Baroness in society as frequently as before, but my interest in her gradually became less keen.

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One evening I was at the theatre, in one of the small boxes, by the side of Hélène Alexandrowska. The company were performing 'Il Trovatore' for the first time, and the house was full to overflowing with a glittering mass of people. The heat was almost stifling, and towards the end of the second act, a man in one of the stage boxes was carried out in a fainting condition.

All eyes were turned in that direction ; for a time all was bustle and confusion ;

they said he was a foreigner, an American.

‘For pity’s sake,’ suddenly whispered Hélène, in a terrified voice, ‘look at the Baroness!’

I glanced furtively in the direction indicated by my inamorata. In the second box next to us sat the Frau von Maszmann; she was as pale as death, and looked as if turned to stone. Deep shadows lay upon her eyes, her cheeks were colourless. She held her handkerchief to her mouth, while, with dilated pupils, she gazed into vacancy.

I was struck to the heart by her look. I expected every moment to see her also fall into a swoon. And no wonder, what with the heat, the entrancing thrill of

Verdi's music, the many odours of scent which floated round (a hateful, unhealthy custom), and above all, the sight of that fainting man! I was about to spring to her help, to fetch a glass of water, to do something, when fortunately, at that moment, the curtain fell.

During the rapturous applause from the gallery, the Baroness rose, pale, rigid as a statue, still holding her handkerchief to her lips, with the same fixed look in her eyes, and walked out with wavering, uncertain steps. On all sides gentlemen tendered her their services, but with a single movement of her hand she waved them back—she would be alone. She drew her fur tippet closely round her, and descended the stairs. I followed her

anxiously. She looked round, and, perceiving me, threw me such an angry glance that I involuntarily recoiled.

In great surprise I re-entered the house, and seated myself at H  l  ne's side.

'Her countenance changed when she saw the stranger faint,' said H  l  ne, compassionately ; 'there must be something infectious in it.'

'I can well believe it,' I answered ; 'the sight of the unconscious man, as they carried him out like one dead, must have terrified her ; she would not even accept my help. You should have seen how her eyes flashed upon me—almost with anger ; I suppose she was ashamed of her weakness, and yet I only meant to call a carriage for her.'

‘Such spoilt princesses have nerves like fine threads,’ I heard a harsh voice say on the other side, and I did not need to turn round to recognise the Baroness Zumberg. ‘How ridiculous, dear Countess!’

‘You are right, my dear,’ returned the Countess Draunfels, eagerly; ‘if a little heat gives people such vapours, they should stay at home, they have no business to go to the theatre. She looked like a corpse—dreadful!’

‘She always wraps herself up so high,’ said the Baroness, scornfully, ‘why cannot she put on a reasonable dress like other people? When the court is in residence, it is proper for people of rank to appear *décolleté*, with flowers in their hair. Is it

not so, dear Lord Chamberlain?' she said to a gentleman, who stood in an elegant attitude behind her chair.

Hélène smiled significantly at me. The Baroness always wore her dresses cut very low, not at all to her advantage.

'I do not think, Baroness, that it was entirely the heat,' returned the Lord Chamberlain, with a diplomatic smile, at the same time offering the lady some chocolate pastilles out of a little silk bag; then the three put their heads close together, and began to chatter.

Woe betide the unhappy creature who should fall under the lash of *their* tongues! The Chamberlain was, if possible, the greatest old woman of the three, and had

the sharpest tongue. At last I heard him say :

‘ There’s the rub, ladies, you may be sure—as the old song has it,

“ Pour jeune femme, il faut jeune mari.”

And now, *au revoir* ; I must go back to his Highness : the bell has already rung for the next scene.’

With a low bow and a significant pressure of the hand, he moved away.

‘ Oh, how wicked and amusing he is !’ tittered the Baroness as he left, fanning herself violently.

‘ Hush, my dear ! the curtain is going up !’

I had long forgotten this trifling and in itself insignificant occurrence, till later cir-

cumstances brought it vividly to my recollection.

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After that day the Baroness remained for some time unknown ; she was 'seen nowhere, neither at the theatre nor in society, and her husband still more rarely. He told me his wife was ill, suffering from a nervous affection ; she was not accustomed to so much gaiety, and must now rest for awhile. The Princess also, with genuine anxiety, confirmed the Baron's statement.

I was rather a favourite of hers, and she said many things to me which she kept secret from others. She said that I was an exception to the general rule, that I could understand the art of silence. Good

old lady, how very much she was mistaken in me !

The Princess led a strange life. She lay in bed every day, with a few occasional exceptions, until five o'clock. She took her chocolate and a glass of Hungarian wine with a slice of meat, which constituted her second breakfast ; after which she received her intimate friends, in the style of the ladies of the period of Louis Quatorze. At six o'clock she dined in the greatest *négligé* ; and then, after dinner, came in its turn the toilette. When this critical point was reached, I discreetly departed—no mortal could behold that with impunity.

This way of living suited the Princess marvellously well, and kept her quite

young. In her seventieth year she had not a finger-ache ; she still preserved the full activity of her mind, and indeed always looked, in full toilette of course, a handsome, imposing old lady. Her figure was upright, her eyes had not lost their fire, her teeth were her own, and her mouth could still laugh. In her youth she had been a beauty, the star of her time ; and the last glow of evening still remained to her, a reflection of her former splendour. A noble mind always sets its stamp upon the countenance, and it was this, added to her unvarying amiability, which attracted all hearts to her. Wicked people said she ate arsenic—but I am digressing.

As I have said, I was one of the most intimate friends of the Princess ; she con-

sidered me a character to be depended upon ; she obtained through me her money from her banker. When her little dog Lucie was ill, I must give advice, and if any little unpleasantness occurred to her, she called me to her aid.

One morning I sat by her bedside, my hat upon my knees, while she, half concealed by the curtains, took her usual cup of chocolate.

‘ I was obliged to beg you to come, Nicolas,’ she said, with a certain air of secrecy.

‘ Your Highness is very gracious,’ I answered.

I looked into my hat, and wondered what was to come next ; evidently it was something particular to-day. Surely her

grand-nephew Alexander, cornet in a regiment of cuirassiers at St. Petersburg, could not have been running into debt again.

‘Will you have the goodness to call Marie?’ she said, without looking up.

I rose and rang the bell. The waiting-maid came and carried away the breakfast. As soon as the girl had left the room, the Princess began suddenly :

‘For Heaven’s sake! what do you think of the Baroness Maszmann? Is she out of her mind?’

‘The Baroness!’ I stammered, gazing at her half in amazement, half in terror.

She raised herself a little, rested her elbow on the pillow, with a serious

thoughtful look on her features. For a moment silence reigned in the room.

Suddenly the Princess lifted her head, and fixed her black eyes anxiously on my countenance.

‘Listen, Nicolas,’ she said quickly, laying her hand on my arm, ‘what wicked tale is this about the Baroness? You know—— I love her as my own daughter, and I fear she is making unhappiness for herself.’

I felt very uneasy and astonished at these words.

‘You do not believe me?’ she continued, shaking her head. ‘You look incredulous—I assure you it can be no longer doubted—I am quite beside myself at the thought of it; the woman has a secret passion—a lover!’

‘Your Highness!’

‘Hush! be silent. You are quite a child in such matters. I am vexed beyond measure, but I fear it is too true. If it were only an ordinary old woman’s tale, I should laugh at it, but——’

The old lady considered for a moment, gazing fixedly at her silken coverlet.

Suddenly she drew a deep breath, and continued:

‘You know, Nicolas, I would never believe anything of the sort—I despise silly gossip, and should be ashamed to repeat it! That is the business of petty, commonplace people, who do not know how to employ their time better.’

Here she laid her hand again upon my

arm, and fixed her large eyes impressively upon me.

‘But there is something more in this report. Only just now I showed the Baroness Zumberg the door when she came telling me about it. Twice every day I have ordered my people to send away the Countess Draunfels, and have talked the greatest nonsense to the Hofmarschall von Bücking—but, after all, the affair cannot be kept secret. Ah! it is sad, very sad, *mon ami*!’

I sat there quite confused, becoming more and more agitated at this disquieting communication.

‘But I entreat your Highness,’ I objected.

‘Listen, Nicolas,’ she continued, almost

in a whisper. ‘You know for some time past she has been suffering : she gives out that she is ill, and does not go out. She seemed to disappear all at once. Well ! nevertheless she has been remarked here and there, by one and another. She has been seen in the twilight, closely disguised, stepping into a miserable fiacre ; she has been out in the evening, in all weathers, going quickly down the most lonely streets—her face veiled, her umbrella held before her, as if she were afraid of being recognised.’

‘Well, yes—that is possible—what conclusion do you draw from that ?’

The old lady shook her head irritably.

‘She has been followed, Nicolas, several times. Every evening, when her husband

is from home, she goes the same way, past the theatre, down Neckar Street, to the second turning off the Old Mound, then up this to a house, No. 3, Garden Road. It is a lonely villa, quite out of the world, half way up the hill. Here live two old people, Herr Köhler and his wife, and with them resides a lodger, an American named Constantine Williams. He is put down in the visitor's list as a private gentleman from New Orleans.'

I was about to reply, but the Princess did not give me time.

'Listen, Nicolas,' she continued impressively : 'you are a friend of the Baron's and Mélanie's. Will you go to the Golden Rose, try to see the Baroness alone, and beg her to come to me to-day, at whatever

hour suits her? I will give her a hint—I will act a mother's part to her: she needs some counsel, some warning. And then, Nicolas, you must find out who this stranger is—this American. I wish to know. They say he is an eccentric man, a sort of hermit. Do you understand? Prove yourself as discreet as wise, dear friend.' She sighed deeply, and again gazed thoughtfully before her.

'How is your little Alexandrowska?' she resumed, after a pause, suddenly changing the conversation.

I coloured slightly.

'She is a pretty girl, and of good family; I will intercede for you if you require it. You are at an age, Nicolas, when a man ought to marry. But now

leave me, that you may return the sooner, and bring me complete information.

Adieu, mon ami—au revoir.'

I made a low bow, and went out.

Much distressed by what I had just heard, I hastened down the steps.

'What a strange, sad affair!' I said to myself; 'the Princess must be mistaken.' But no, there must be something in it. For days and weeks I have frequently seen the Baroness seated at the window, weeping, or watched her shadow in the evening as she wandered restlessly up and down the room. Little Nina takes her morning walks alone with her governess; her mother never accompanies her now. But I have seen her several times clasp the child passionately to her breast, pale and

tearful. And then—have I not twice myself met the Baroness out in fog and darkness, thickly veiled to avoid recognition? I knew her by her walk, her carriage. I looked after her in astonishment, and murmured, ‘Gracious Heaven, was not that the Baroness?’ Yes! all cannot be right, there must be some mystery. One glance at the death-like countenance of the beautiful woman as she stands at the window and, full of sorrow, gazes up at the stars as if to find consolation there, tells its tale of woe.

These thoughts lay like a heavy sorrow upon my heart. I had regarded her as something holy, something to be worshipped, and now she sank suddenly to the dust; her name was in people’s

mouths — and what people ! Good heavens !

I went with hasty steps down Neckar street, turned into the grounds of the Old Mound, and went along Garden Road. This was a narrow path between hedges, which led steeply up the hill. There were only two or three houses in it, far apart from one another.

Why—where had been my thoughts ? That villa over there at the corner belonged to the Baniutins, I had frequently been there with my beloved Hélène. Their house was a very pleasant one, and the lady very handsome and agreeable.

How could I be so forgetful ? It was exactly here I stood one evening in the

moonlight with Consul Scheffler and his charming wife. We were coming from the Baniutins, and were in very gay spirits, laughing and joking all the way. Suddenly Hélène stood still, and said 'Hush!' Our talking ceased at once—we listened.

Some one in a house close by was playing upon a violin. We drew nearer; a faint light glimmered behind closely-drawn curtains. One side of the window was open, and the unknown played on in a masterly manner, holding us entranced. We stood underneath, breathless, without moving, and listened for a quarter of an hour. We could not tear ourselves away until the music had ceased, although it was very sad. It must have been over there

at No. 3, the very house. I stepped across through the snow—the number was on the gate. He must live here, that American.

I looked at the house closely; it lay back a little from the road in a garden—a little unassuming villa, with five windows in front, and three stories. The blinds were all drawn down except one, which was about half way up, and behind which I caught a glimpse of curtains of blue silk.

Against the iron railings I saw the bell, and under this a highly-polished brass plate with the words ‘Gustave Köhler, ducal Registrator.’

I went past the house; the road continued on, but there were only gardens

and fields higher up—No. 3 was the last of the houses.

I stood still for a moment considering. Should I go in? It was not curiosity which prompted these inquiries, but genuine interest and sympathy.

‘Go on, Nicolas,’ I said to myself, and turned again resolutely. With a beating heart I went back, once more scanned the house, window after window, then laid my hand upon the bright knob. The sound of a bell was audible, and at the same moment the garden-door sprang open as if by magic, while the long wire which connected it with the house still vibrated.

Inside, the snow was carefully swept away, leaving a little path. Up this she has passed, I thought to myself, and I

even looked for her footprints in the damp earth. Slowly I approached the house; the door stood half open. I crossed the threshold and found myself confronted by an elderly woman with a shrewd, intellectual face, and looking like a lady, although very simply dressed.

As she stood there and looked at me expectantly, it flashed across my mind that I did not actually want anything. I was in a dilemma; nevertheless, I composed myself.

‘Frau Köhler, I believe?’ I said, with a bow.

‘At your service, sir.’

‘I wish to inquire of you—you let lodgings, madame?’

‘Yes, we have some rooms for strangers,’ she answered politely.

‘A gentleman has been living here for some time, an American of the name of Williams.’

The expression of the woman’s countenance suddenly changed; she gave me a sharp look, folded her arms, and threw back her head. There was an involuntary defiance in this gesture. ‘How does that concern you?’ it unmistakably said.

‘Is the gentleman at home?’ I continued.

‘Your pardon, sir; are you one of the friends of Mr. Williams?’ was her reply, accompanied by another searching look.

‘Well, no, not exactly,’ I answered, somewhat embarrassed.

There was something in the woman's countenance which made me feel quite disconcerted, especially as my conscience was not quite clear.

‘I only ask, because, if not, I must tell you that the gentleman is ill, and receives no one,’ she said shortly ; ‘may I ask you for your card, that I may carry it to him ?’

‘I will come again, when your lodger is better ; my name does not matter.’

‘Indeed !’ said the lady, with a stern look.

‘I bid you good-day, madame.’

‘Adieu !’

I stood outside the gate with a very uncomfortable feeling ; I was evidently not intended for a diplomatist. This will be a

nice tale for the Princess, if she hears it ; she will scold me well.

I returned slowly homewards, ashamed of myself, not daring even to look round. I went straight to the Casino, and entered the reading-room. I took up the visitor's list, and began to turn over the leaves. Ah, here it is—' Herr Constantine Williams, private gentleman, New Orleans, America ; Madame Köhler's, No. 3, Garden Road.'

Constantine ! A strange Christian name for an American ! This list was dated September 29th. I turned further back, there it was again—' Constantine Williams, Hôtel Victoria.' So he put up there, before he retired to that lonely villa.

I rose immediately, and went down Neckar Street, towards the hotel. As I

passed the Princess's, I saw the Countess Draunfels; she darted out of the house with a red and angry face, and stepped into her carriage. She has been shown the door again, I thought, and rubbed my hands.

Arrived at the Hôtel Victoria, I asked for the stranger's book, and began to question the porter. I could learn but little, only that Mr. Williams was a tall, dark man, about five-and-thirty years old, and very much afflicted; he had come to W—— to try the waters.

A tall, thin man, with dark hair sprinkled with grey, very gloomy, and sparing of his words. Good heavens! it was impossible that the Baroness could have fallen in love with this man! I did not believe a word

of the whole story—it was a mistake—a slander. Perhaps it was some unknown poor man, some invalid, whom she was supporting. The world is *so* wicked!

I went home, but I was not satisfied. I will lie in ambush, I thought. ‘No, Nicolas, that you will not do,’ said my conscience; ‘never mind the disappointment and anger of the Princess; it is wrong to be suspicious—mean to be a spy!’

From this time I looked less than before at the window of the Golden Rose, and listened in silence and humility when I was reproached for having so ill-fulfilled my mission.

During the next fortnight I could not but notice the old gentleman, the Baron

Maszmann. Something strange had evidently happened to him: he was quite changed—a threatening cloud lay ever upon his brow. Merciful heaven! could that slanderous tale have reached his ears? One could scarcely doubt it, his countenance was so troubled. An indescribable feeling of anxiety seized my heart, a presentiment of coming evil. Ah! it was fulfilled all too soon. It was like the lightning which flashes out of the dark cloud, then comes the thunderclap, bringing destruction and terrifying men's hearts.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAGEDY.

‘ Let us meet
And question this most bloody piece of work,
To know it farther.’



CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAGEDY.

I WAS very fond of a game of cards, and several times a week was accustomed to join a party at ombre in the little Casino.

The President of police and two other gentlemen, a retired colonel, and a country squire, with my unworthy self, were constant players.

The Baron von Maszmann, also, came in pretty regularly in the evening to play whist, or watch the other games.

It was one Wednesday in March. Very bad weather had set in, dark clouds rolled down from the mountains, and the wind dashed the heavy rain-drops against the window-panes, as if some one from outside were throwing large handfuls of peas at them.

We sat in the comfortable little card-room of the Casino, and played our game, quite absorbed in the cards. The blue smoke of the cigars filled the room with a soft mist, and in the glasses sparkled the golden Rhine wine. I noticed casually, as the President was dealing, his dark eyes glance towards the door, and involuntarily I followed their gaze.

I was terrified. The Baron von Maszmann was just entering ; he looked as pale

as a dead man ; with darkly-frowning brow, and eyes fixed, he stood at the door, dripping with rain.

He shook himself and looked round, as if seeking some one, till his eyes fell upon the Hofmarschall von Bücking. A gleam of hate seemed to shoot from under his half-closed lids when he perceived him. Without noticing any of us, he went straight across, and laid his hand heavily upon his shoulder.

The Hofmarschall looked up, somewhat frightened, laid down his cards, and rose hastily, with a confused smile. Both retired into the next room.

The President threw me a significant glance from his sharp eyes. It made me tremble, without knowing why. I felt an

unutterable anxiety ; a confused picture of the imagination flitted across the mirror of my soul. I seemed to see a serpent coiling itself round a lion. I had just the feeling that I must spring up and rush into that other room, to prevent some dreadful calamity.

‘It is your turn to play,’ said my partner.

Mechanically I drew a card.

‘I have something to say to you afterwards,’ whispered the President in my ear.

‘Look at that wretched creature over there ! I believe he rejoices in his villany—the Jesuit !’

I looked up, and saw the Hofmarschall von Bücking re-entering the room, still smiling, apparently well satisfied with himself, and rubbing his hands. His large,

thin mouth reached almost from ear to ear, and his small eyes twinkled with delight.

‘Forgive me, gentlemen, if I have kept you waiting,’ he simpered, and threw himself affectedly into a chair. ‘Waiter, bring me a light—a small matter of business—a bagatelle,’ he added, between the puffs of his cigar.

The President looked sternly at him, and then murmured :

‘The Baron is gone?’

‘Yes, he is gone.’

What could he have wanted with that man? The Hofmarschall was the centre of all the gossip in W——, a malicious indiscreet fellow, whose whole delight was in scandal.

And then the Baron's gloomy countenance, his rigid look, his strange behaviour! A shiver stole over me—I could think but of one thing—what could have happened? What is he going to do? Have they had a quarrel, or is it something else?

I should like to have sprung up and hastened after the Baron, or have seized the Hofmarschall by the throat and said to him, 'Confess, fellow, what have you done?'

I was greatly excited, and made mistake after mistake in the game.

Half an hour passed away; I sat upon thorns the whole time.

The door opened noiselessly, and the head of the landlord appeared.

‘The President of police is wanted,’ he said cautiously, and disappeared.

Herr von Simmern finished the deal quickly, and rose.

‘One moment, gentlemen,’ he said apologetically, and went out.

We others sat and waited. The Colonel abused the weather and complained of his stiff knee, while the other ordered his third pint. *They* did not make themselves uneasy because the chief of the police had been called out ; that happened very often ; such an important official must do without sleep. *I*, on the contrary, sat on thorns, with a feeling as if an icy hand were laid upon my heart.

‘You are not quite well to-day,’ began

the Colonel, looking at me with sympathy. 'No wonder; in this miserable weather every one suffers.'

At this moment the President returned. I looked at him—there was something peculiar in his countenance, a sort of fixed resolution. I know not why, but I sprang from my seat as if by an irresistible impulse.

He said nothing, but made a slight movement with his head, and stepped into the recess of a window. In a moment I was at his side.

'Keep your countenance,' he whispered, seizing my hand with a firm, sharp pressure.

'Well?' I stammered anxiously.

'A great calamity has taken place—

come with me immediately—I have already sent for a carriage.'

My heart stood still.

'Good God—the Baroness!' I exclaimed, trembling.

'Hush! not a word! Go out and get ready; I will make our apologies here.'

I could have shrieked aloud in my anxiety, but I was obliged to restrain myself, so as not to excite suspicion by my behaviour.

'Great God, have mercy!' I groaned, and left the room.

I was hardly ready when the President again joined me. He spoke a few words to the landlord, and drew me to the door. Outside in the pouring rain stood two

police officers. I could restrain myself no longer.

‘Tell me, I implore you, what has happened!’ I asked, trembling.

The President seized my arm, bent his head to my ear, and whispered :

‘A very sad tale—the Baron is shot!’

‘Merciful Heaven!’ I said in terror. ‘The unhappy man! Has he killed himself?’

‘They say he is dead,’ he replied, ‘but we shall see for ourselves. I am not fond of allowing myself to be prejudiced beforehand by the reports of others; it leads only to false conjectures, and then one loses the track from the beginning.’

At this moment Herr von Simmern was quite the official. He stood there in the

flickering light of the door-lamp, and appeared to be meditating with a calm and serious expression, while I was trembling with agitation and grief.

‘I have requested you to accompany me because I thought you might be of some use, my dear Bagdanoff; you are intimately acquainted with the Maszmanns. But, thank God, here comes the carriage! jump in, my friend.’

We sprang in, one of the policemen placed himself on the box, the horses started, and we rolled away.

What fearful ideas rushed through my mind as we hastily traversed the streets, not without some danger, on account of the thick darkness! The scanty street-lamps glided past like faint will-o'-the-

wisps. I wished to ask many questions, but by the fitful light I could see that the President was entirely occupied with his own thoughts, and I did not like to disturb him.

At last he began :

‘That cursed Bücking, I will swear that he is at the bottom of it! But let him beware, the wretch! I will make him hear of it. If I am not mistaken in my supposition, I will go straight to the Prince to-morrow: he is a real pest to the town—to the whole land—a parasite—a sneak—it is his whole business to make mischief!’

‘But, for Heaven’s sake, tell me what has happened?’

‘Listen!’ he laid his hand upon my

knee. 'I have just had a report from Sergeant Stagmann that in the Garden Road a distinguished man, a stranger, is lying mortally wounded. A woman, the wife of Herr Köhler, came into the police-office breathless, pale as death, to make the announcement. She also added that the Baron was murdered by another gentleman, an American, who for some time past has been lodging with them, and has been in all respects a quiet, orderly man, in an infirm state of health; the quarrel took place on account of a lady, the wife of the wounded man, and apparently some relation to the American.'

I gave utterance to a deep sigh.

'So that is it,' I stammered in terror.

'The woman further said, the stranger

had come to their house about half-past nine ; her husband would have sent him away, but he said he was a friend, and, pushing them aside, ascended the stairs. Immediately a shot was heard, and when they both hastened to the spot in great terror, they found the gentleman lying upon the ground in mortal agony, with the still smoking pistol by his side. The woman left her husband with the dead body, and herself hastened to the town to announce to the authorities what had happened. That, my dear Bagdanoff, is what I have heard. But here we are at the place.'

The carriage was just turning into a dark street, lighted only by a single oil-lamp at the corner ; it stopped, the

policeman jumped down and opened the door.

In spite of the darkness and the bad weather some people had collected, and stood by the railings, talking loudly with one another. I heard their murmurs and muttered curses as I descended from the carriage, with the policeman's warning 'Stand back !'

When the crowd recognised, by the light of the carriage-lamp, the serious countenance of the chief of the police, they became silent and stepped back. One solitary voice exclaimed wildly over the heads of the others :

'So a murder has been committed in W——! Drag the hound away to prison—make short work with him !'

‘Hold your noise!’ called out another, ‘here come the President and the doctor.’

‘Silence!’ cried the policeman, and began to disperse the people roughly, to prove his active zeal.

Through a line of dark figures we entered the little garden; the gate was closed behind us. With a sorrowful heart I looked up. There, behind that lighted curtain, in that same room where not long ago the sweet tones of the violin had fallen softly on our ears, had this terrible thing been done. Good God! what were we about to see?

We entered the house. A policeman stood on guard at the foot of the stairs, down which a terrified maid-servant was

hastening, carrying some blood-stained linen in her hand.

The policeman gave his superior a short, whispered report ; then we silently ascended the stairs, and arrived upon a small corridor, dimly lighted by a lamp.

The President listened a moment, and then opened a door.

My heart almost stopped beating. ‘God, have mercy!’ I prayed in silence.

He went first and stepped into the room, I remained as if spell-bound upon the threshold.

A terrible sight met my gaze. At one end of a large, well-lighted room stood a bed, with its dark curtains drawn back so that the light fell clearly upon the pillow

and coverlet. Between them I perceived the head of a man, whose pale, deathlike countenance was surrounded by a profusion of dark hair, and a large black beard. His eyes were closed, and a thin waxen hand lay motionless upon the silken coverlet.

Bending over this strange form, and almost hiding it with the upper part of her body, was an elegantly-attired, womanly figure. I recognised her at once. Good heavens! it was the Baroness—her whole frame quivered convulsively.

At the head of the bed stood a small table; on it some medicine bottles and a hand-bell. Underneath, on the carpet, lay a half-open book, and close by a small double-barrelled pistol. Farther off, in

the middle of the room, lay the Baron, stretched out in a pool of blood. Over him knelt an elderly man, attempting to stop the blood which continually welled out of a wound in his left side.

‘He is dying!’ whispered Herr Köhler (for it was he); ‘it is all over with him,’ as he looked up with an expression of horror. ‘Terrible!’ he murmured, ‘and in my house, too!’

At this moment that dark feminine form rose hastily from the stranger’s bed, as if just aroused from a fearful dream, and turned round to us. With a despairing gesture she drew her hand through her long black hair, which fell around her in entangled masses to her waist. Her large lustreless eyes gazed at us fixedly ;

then a shudder ran through her whole frame, and, wringing her hands, she groaned :

‘ Unhappy creature that I am—I have killed him !’

Such an expression of deep, overwhelming anguish showed itself in her voice and in her whole appearance, that even the chief of the police had something like tears in his eyes.

I have seen many things in my life which might shake the nerves of a resolute man. I was in the Caucasus, where I experienced something of the horrors of war—man opposed to man. I was in Poland during the last rebellion, and witnessed many terrible scenes ; but never have I felt such deep anguish, such unspeakable,

heartfelt pain, as at this sight in this quiet room.

What a fearful, appalling drama !

All was still—the lamp burnt peacefully. Only a smothered groan was heard at intervals, or a gust of wind rattled the window, or the rain dashed gloomily upon the panes.

But upon what unutterable misery did that lamp shine ! The destruction of three lives !

I clasped my hands convulsively, and hot tears stood in my eyes.

A sign from the President arrested my movements ; a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders, and the officer began to perform his duty.

His sharp glance took in the whole room

—not an object, not a corner appeared to escape him. Then he stepped on one side, and slowly bent over the wounded man.

‘The bleeding is ceasing a little,’ whispered the registrar to him, pressing his hand firmly upon the Baron’s side.

Herr von Simmern nodded his head without answering, and began to subject the hand of the Baron to a minute examination.

‘Shall I render some assistance there?’ I asked cautiously, indicating the group on the other side.

‘Do not move. The doctor must be here in a moment,’ he returned decidedly, and again bent over the form of the Baron. He beckoned me to bring him a light.

With the greatest care he continued his examination, as if he wished to discover something particular on those hands, which might afford him some explanation of the fearful deed that had taken place.

The left hand was uncovered; there was a mourning ring on it, and the heavy signet ring engraved with the Baron's arms, but not the least mark was to be found. The right hand had on a glove of brown deer-skin—it was damp with rain, and on the inner side of the forefinger, at the lower joint, was to be seen a long narrow pressure.

‘Do you see this?’ whispered the President cautiously to me; ‘look closely at this faint mark on the damp leather! What do you think it is?’

I bent lower over the wounded man, and knelt down in order to examine him more closely. I held the light of the taper as near as possible to the hand, while I felt the eyes of the officer resting upon me expectantly.

‘Good God! it is the impression of the trigger of a pistol,’ I said, looking up.

Our eyes met significantly for a second, and then were directed simultaneously to the little murderous instrument which lay upon the carpet.

‘That is quite a new version of the affair,’ murmured the President, and slowly shook his head. ‘A suicide!’

There was something in his voice and manner which showed how difficult it was

for him to believe it—to admit this fresh thought into his circle of ideas.

At this moment hasty steps were heard outside, the door opened noisily, and a man entered with a forbidding countenance and rough grey hair—it was the doctor.

‘Well! what is the matter? Ah! there it lies!’ he exclaimed, and nodded a hasty greeting to us. He laid aside his overcoat, which was dripping with rain, and turned up his cuffs.

‘May I beg you to be a little more quiet?’ said the President, warningly, with a reproachful look, pointing to the Baroness.

‘Ah, indeed!’ growled the doctor, and threw a piercing look in the same direction,

slightly drawing down the corners of his mouth. ‘Only a swoon, apparently,’ he said, shrugging his shoulders, and gave his attention to the wounded man.

He drew the shirt aside, and, with Herr Köhler’s help, turned the heavy body more upon its back ; then he wiped his spectacles and commenced his examination. This caused him to frown deeply and shake his head, as he laid his instruments upon the floor beside him.

‘Right through the left lung,’ he growled. ‘Will you kindly give orders, Herr President, to have a bed prepared immediately for the Baron ? he needs the utmost care. Keep the compress here, registrar,’ he added, turning to him—‘cold water, nothing more at first, and the greatest quiet.’

He rose, shook himself slightly, and then approached the bed.

The Baroness looked at him with a fixed and glassy stare; she passed her hand quickly across her brow, as if she would drive away some hateful picture, and gave utterance to a slight cry. Only a hasty glance did the doctor vouchsafe the lady, a glance which seemed to me the spiteful look of a mean soul, delighted to see a noble lady in such a position; then he bent over the fainting man, and laid his hand upon his breast.

At this the Baroness rose upright, and drew a step back. Slightly bending forward, she appeared to be listening intently, while she stretched out her hands as if

warding off something, keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon the doctor.

‘A deep swoon,’ he said, turning to us. ‘Water—ice!’ he commanded sharply.

I hastened out, and sent the servant to procure what was necessary, as quickly as possible.

In the meanwhile the doctor took the water, which had been used to cool the Baron’s wound, and sprinkled a little on the fainting man’s face. The drops rolled slowly off his forehead, leaving behind them light reddish marks which stained the pillow.

‘Blood—blood!’ shrieked the unhappy woman, wringing her hands in horror; ‘I—wretch that I am!—I have killed him—he is dying!’

I scarcely had time to spring to her help—I put my arm round her, and begged her to calm herself. A shiver ran through her from head to foot, her features became deathly pale, and like a dead thing she sank slowly to the ground.

‘Go out and see that a room is being prepared—the Baron must be taken to bed at once—he will die under our hands,’ said the President, with a movement of the hand. ‘But stay—one moment,’ he continued, seizing me by the arm ; ‘you know the Baron’s family physician ?’

‘Certainly. Dr. Wilhelmi.’

‘Then take the carriage which is waiting below, hasten to him, and bring him here. You will probably find him at home now.’

He pushed me out.

With a heavy heart I threw myself into the carriage and drove away.

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAGEDY—*continued.*

‘He slept at last,
A troubled, dreamy sleep. Well—had he slept
Never to waken more! His hours are few,
But terrible his agony.’



CHAPTER V.

THE TRAGEDY—*continued.*

FORTUNATELY I found the Doctor at home. I hastily imparted to him what had happened. For one moment he was horrified, but quickly recollecting himself, he put some necessary medicines into his coat-pockets and we drove back to the scene of death. On the way I related the details, as far as I knew them.

‘A suicide!’ he cried, shaking his head. ‘And the Baroness—I could not have believed it possible. What a position for

her husband! What a terrible struggle must take place in a man's heart! Such a sight would rouse all the evil passions of man's nature, and madden him with the determination to kill either the false lover or the guilty wife! But a man of principle, of kindness of heart, would almost rather turn the muzzle of the pistol against himself!

‘That is indeed the most cruel, the most terrible vengeance that it is possible for a man to take!’ I cried, almost beside myself.

‘Certainly,’ answered the Doctor, with a gloomy brow. ‘If he destroys himself, it is threefold, hundredfold death for the guilty. And the Baroness! Such an amiable, lovely woman—I could have

sworn that her soul was as pure as gold !

‘ Ah, I could have done so also, Doctor. And still even now, in spite of that fearful testimony, in spite of that terrible cry, that self-accusation, “ I have killed him !” I cannot—I will not believe that this model of a true lady in a few short weeks could be untrue to all her principles, untrue to honour itself—that she could become a fallen woman. My whole feelings revolt from it. There is some mystery here—God grant it may be explained !

It seemed to me as if some light from heaven must come down to illuminate this darkness, to tear away this dark veil. If this woman is a fallen one, if those noble features, that angelic beauty, are nothing

but a lie — in what can one believe again?

We entered the room. The wounded man had been removed into an adjoining apartment. But there lay the American in the same place, more resembling a corpse than a living being, while by his couch knelt the unhappy lady, apparently praying.

Outside, with the chief of the police, were the magistrate and his clerk, to make the legal investigation.

The Doctor stepped up to the bed, the President gave me a sign to come to him.

‘The affair is becoming complicated: look here,’ he whispered softly, and pointed to the weapon he held in his hand. ‘We

have been mistaken, Bagdanoff, see—it was the barrel, not the trigger, of the pistol which left that mark upon the glove.'

He held out to me both the pistol and the glove ; it was true, the impression on the leather exactly fitted the barrel.

Perplexed, terrified, I gazed at the President, and murmured something, I know not what.

'So it was not he who fired that deadly shot,' he rejoined, in a scarcely audible voice. 'There is no impression of a trigger upon the glove — this is no suicide.'

'Merciful God!' I stammered in perplexity.

My gaze wandered involuntarily to the

couch, where the Doctor was occupied with the sick man, and was just then applying a bottle of strong salts to his nose.

‘A murder then!’ cried a voice in my ear, and the room began to turn with me.

But I would not, I could not believe it ; there are things one cannot believe, in spite of the strongest evidence.

Nevertheless, one thing was clear. There lay a man, mortally wounded, with a shot in his breast, and though he had had the pistol in his hand, he had not fired it himself. Wild ideas rushed through my brain like a flood. Terrible pictures presented themselves to my imagination ! I saw the Baron, informed and goaded on

by the Hofmarschall, entering this room, pistol in hand, to avenge his violated honour. I saw him standing, pale and threatening, where now that pool of blood covered the floor. Stern in his righteous wrath, he held the weapon in his hand, pointed straight at the stranger. I saw the wife, paralysed with terror, standing by; she saw the deadly weapon raised, directed full at the heart of her beloved—she uttered a shriek—threw herself upon her angry husband, and seized his arm. ‘Have mercy!’ she cried, ‘spare him!’ There was a short struggle—then a fearful accident—the pistol was discharged into the husband’s breast! Mortally wounded, he sank like a dead man to the earth—steps were heard approaching. On one

side lay her husband, bleeding to death ; on the other, her lover in a deep swoon. The unhappy lady, racked by all the torments of hell, cried in self-accusation, ' I have killed him ! I have killed him !'

' A dark—a fearful drama !' murmured the President. ' The only one who can bring some light into this chaos will not survive the coming night—his mouth is closed for ever.'

My heart sank within me. So this also must come upon her ! What would happen now ? From whence could the truth be obtained ?

There was a little stir at the other end of the room. The fainting man made a scarcely perceptible movement ; he opened

his eyes, and with a troubled look gazed round the apartment.

The Doctor immediately placed his arm under his head, and raised him a little, so that on his return to consciousness he might be able to breathe more freely. The Baroness gave utterance to a slight cry, then a sob was heard from behind her clasped hands.

The President gave me a sign, and went out. I followed him.

‘There are too many people in the room,’ he said softly. ‘Will you go across to the Baron and watch over him? Pay great attention to every word—to every syllable—that he speaks. Everything is of the greatest importance. My duty is in here.’

As he left me I looked after him.

When he opened the door, I could see the stranger in his bed, sitting upright, with a rigid expression of countenance. The Baroness had seized one of his hands and bent her head over it. Dark, heavy masses of hair almost entirely concealed her face.

I shook my head anxiously. What did it all mean? That man—I recognised him now—I had seen the solitary wanderer several times before, always alone, always in unfrequented roads—a tall, distinguished-looking man—an invalid, pale and haggard. How came the Baroness to know this man? How could she lose her heart to this world-weary wanderer, when a thousand others had sighed at her feet in vain?

Women are incomprehensible creatures !

Is it possible that a lady of the highest virtue, who had led an irreproachable life for five-and-twenty years, should, in a few short weeks, dishonour her husband and even become his murderess ? And for such a man as the one over there ! In what a world do we live !

With a sad and sorrowful heart I entered the room where the dying husband lay. The police-doctor sat by his bed. He threw me an angry look. Without noticing it, I took a place on one side, so that I could observe the Baron.

He lay there pale and rigid, stretched at full length on his couch. So fixed were his features, that one could have imagined he was already dead. Nevertheless, it

seemed as if he had regained consciousness, for sometimes, when the doctor touched his body with the cold sponge, he opened his eyes, and looked slowly round the room with an inquiring and threatening gaze. The look only lasted each time for a few seconds, then the lids closed feebly, and the features resumed their former expression.

I sat there a long time without moving, buried in painful thought.

Suddenly the door opened, and the Baroness came in trembling. Poor lady—unhappy creature! how wild she looked—maddened with terror! What desolation of soul had that one hour worked in those lovely features!

She remained standing for a moment

near the door to recover breath, to collect her thoughts ; she pressed her hand firmly upon her bosom, and raised her eyes on high, as if appealing to God for mercy for her guilt-laden soul. A stifled sob burst from her lips ; a cold shudder ran through her frame. She seemed as if she would sink into the earth.

By a great effort, mastering her emotion, she came forward, trembling, and stood at her husband's bedside. The doctor rose sullenly. She sank into his seat, and seized the Baron's hand.

‘ Rudolph ! ’ she murmured, with trembling lips. ‘ Oh, Rudolph ! ’ in a tone that cut me to the heart.

Her husband slowly opened his eyes, gazed fixedly for a second on the unhappy

woman, then closed them again. His brow resumed its threatening expression—he hastily withdrew his hand from his wife’s clasp, as if he recoiled from her touch.

Two large tears rolled slowly down the pale cheeks of the Baroness, and dropped upon her bosom. She sat there, the picture of misery—the handsome, proud woman, in the agony of remorse and sorrow.

I pitied her from my heart.

Her head sank upon her breast, and she closed her eyes. She remained a long time without making the slightest movement, and it was so still in the room that I could hear the beating of my own heart.

The doctor broke this painful silence. With the damp compress in his hand, he approached the couch.

‘Pardon me, madame,’ he said, rather less roughly than before.

He turned back the covering, and I rose to lead the Baroness away, for the sight of the wound might terrify her. She yielded in silence—I do not think she recognised me—she was too overwhelmed with grief.

As I was returning to my post, the President came and beckoned me out.

‘The stranger is recovering!’ he said. ‘Oh, Bagdanoff, can this scene of misery be real! One sees many strange things in my profession, but this borders on unbelief. The Doctor will stay with him—no interrogation can be attempted as yet. The only one who could speak would be the Baroness. But I must confess to you, the present unhappy condition of that lady

inspires me with such pity, that it goes against my heart to pain her now. I will take the responsibility of the delay upon myself, but this must be on one condition, dear friend—you must promise me, in the interests of justice, to stay in the house to-night. Of course the Doctor will be with them—you have therefore only to be careful that everything remains unaltered—do you understand?’

‘Certainly, I quite understand, and will do all you wish.’

‘I know *that*, and thank you heartily,’ said he. ‘My presence would be painful to the Baroness, would agitate and terrify her, and that in any case would be prejudicial—above all, for the elucidation of the mystery. Promise me this one thing, that

you will conscientiously watch every word and every action that might be of any importance, and that you will send for me immediately in case any change should take place here. I will leave two of my men behind me; they will remain below with the landlord, and will be entirely at your orders.'

I faithfully promised everything.

The President had turned to go, when he suddenly came back and seized my arm.

'I shall be glad if we find that *she*, at least, had no actual share in that fearful deed,' he said, with deep emotion. 'I shall hasten at once to the Golden Rose, to take precautions that no one may learn what has happened, and to give the strictest orders to the editors of the various journals

to be silent. That scandal-mongering paper, the *Weekly Review*, must be muzzled—you understand ?

I pressed his hand.

‘And now, good-night, Bagdanoff,’ he said, while an angry glance flashed from his eyes ; ‘I am going to prepare a little surprise for some one.’

‘What are you going to do ?’

‘To put the Hofmarschall under lock and key,’ he whispered in my ear.

I looked at him with amazement.

He nodded his head emphatically, and pressed my hand in his.

‘He is a reptile upon whose neck I will put my foot—but not a word : this is in the strictest confidence. And now, once more, good-night.’

The President gave me an assuring smile, and descended the steps.

The magistrate and the others followed, except the two men who were left on guard. Soon afterwards the police-doctor took his leave, with the spiteful remark :

‘ I am no longer wanted here, Herr Colleague.’

The other surgeon and I remained alone on the scene of the calamity.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT OF DARKNESS.

‘ From short, as usual, and disturbed repose,
I wake ; how happy they who wake no more !’



CHAPTER VI.

THE NIGHT OF DARKNESS.

IT was the most miserable night of my life. Two men, in mortal agony, placed under my care—the one perhaps the murderer of the other—each in separate rooms ; and between them the woman, the cause of all this misery, wandering like a ghost from one to the other without peace or rest.

How many significant looks did we cast upon one another as the hours slowly

rolled by, and how longingly we wished that the day would come !

The Baron sank into a lethargic condition—a sleep as deep and sound as death. About four in the morning the sick stranger also slept. On a chair near him sat the unhappy lady watching his slumbers, until she also lost consciousness.

Merciful God ! how she must love that strange man ! Wretched, mistaken woman !

What a fearful condition was this for such a being as she, whose life, until now, had been a mirror of purity, upon whose character rested not the slightest stain, before whose countenance slander mutely bowed its head !

What a deep, bottomless abyss !

Yesterday she was fêted and courted—
to-day she is an outcast. The iron hand
of justice is stretched out towards her.

From the salon to the dungeon !

My heart bled. I could think of
nothing else but that.

* * * * *

When she awoke, as the first faint
glimmer from the east heralded the ap-
proach of another day, the Baroness recog-
nised me. She pressed her hand upon her
eyes and began to weep bitterly. In the
cold grey twilight the scene looked
more awful than ever. She raised her
eyes for one second to mine, and in her
look I read her thoughts : ‘ Yesterday, at
this hour, I was an enviable woman—to-

day I wake from a short, terrifying slumber, and find myself the most miserable.'

I stepped up to her.

'Dear lady,' I said compassionately, 'tell me, what can I do for you?'

For a short time she stood there, sobs choking her utterance; then she cried, with an accent of heart-rending grief:

'Ah! I have killed *him*, Bagdanoff, as well as this one,' pointing to the pale dark-haired man lying on the bed. In this simple movement there was something more touching even than in the tone of her voice. 'I am an unhappy creature,' she sobbed.

'Mélanie!'

The stranger's voice suddenly sounded

from behind the curtains; its tone was faint, but impressive.

‘Mélanie!’

The sick man called again, and raised himself a little.

The Baroness turned to him—her eyes gleamed feverishly.

‘Constantine! Beloved Constantine!’ she sobbed, raising her arms passionately, and sank on her knees by his couch—her frame quivered with emotion.

The invalid placed his thin long hand soothingly upon her head, and murmured soft words of comfort.

This sight quite overcame me, and set my inmost soul in uproar. Revulsion and compassion struggled together for the mastery. Over there, only a few steps

away, lay the dying husband ; and here—here knelt the wife by the couch of her lover ! What an abyss is a woman's soul !

The greatest nobility, and the deepest degradation, how close do they lie to one another !

Unhappy creature ! she appeared even to be praying—her eyes were raised on high, her hands clasped, her lips moving.

And the hand of that man—perhaps the same hand that had directed the instrument of murder to her husband's heart—still rested upon her head.

I rose hastily. Aversion—detestation seized me. I rushed out. 'Give me air,' I cried, and put both hands to my head.

But enough, enough of this heart-rending scene.

In the early morning came the servant of the Princess, desiring urgently to see me ; he brought a note from his mistress, written by her own hand, which was most unusual for her. It ran thus :

‘What a terrible event, my friend ! Come to me at once—I must speak to you immediately.

‘Your very affectionate

‘O. A.

So the Princess had already heard the news of the terrible event that had happened. Perhaps the whole town knew it by this time, in spite of all the precautions of the President. Reports penetrate even

through door-chinks and key-holes. Good heavens! what a story must be circulating all over W——!

I hastily wrote a few lines on the Princess's note, to the effect that I would come as soon as possible, and gave it to the servant.

Scarcely had he gone when the chief of the police appeared.

‘Well, what has happened here? How has the night passed?’ he asked, drawing me aside, and looking searchingly in my face.

I gave him a detailed report of everything, especially with regard to the behaviour of the Baroness. I was overstrained with all that I had gone through; the painful scene of misery had told on my nerves and quite exhausted me. Besides,

I was angry and indignant, as well as grieved, at what I had just witnessed. I took all imaginable pains to express no harsh opinion. I endeavoured to speak quite impartially, yet the President's eyes gradually became fixed upon me with a peculiar expression; the longer I spoke, the more anxious was his countenance. I told him how the Baroness had cried out, 'I have killed *him*, as well as this one!' and this information appeared particularly to strike him. He put his hand on his chin, and reflected for some time.

'The affair becomes more complicated, Bagdanoff,' he said, after some time; 'I cannot understand it; help me, I pray you, to arrive at some conclusion.'

I shook my head mournfully.

‘We shall have to commence the formal examination to-day,’ he continued, after a long pause. Then he added, shrugging his shoulders: ‘This sad story will cause the most painful excitement. His Highness will be almost beside himself—the Maszmans were amongst the most intimate visitors of the Court circle.’

‘Of course,’ I answered; ‘and then the poor child Nina—the thought of the little one lies heavily on my heart. Perhaps, in the meantime, she might be taken to the Princess. Her good heart——’

‘That is an excellent idea!’ hastily interrupted the President. ‘Will you add to your other kindnesses, dear Bagdanoff, by fetching the little creature yourself? Tell her some plausible story—that her

parents have been suddenly called away, and will return in a few days—or something similar—you will easily manage it. But, above all things, take care that the child does not come in contact with other people, nor hear anything that might enter like poisoned venom into her soul. You would not believe how far malice will go: I can give you a proof of it. I can tell you a very pretty tale when you come back.'

He urged me to hasten.

I myself experienced the liveliest longing to go out into the fresh air, to be able to take breath, and collect my thoughts. Seizing my hat, I hurried down the stairs, and had already reached the lower flight, when the President bent over the banisters and called to me.

‘Stay one moment—I have *one* agreeable piece of news for you. Our friend the Hofmarschall has been under lock and key since yesterday; taken straight from the ombre-table!

I remained rooted to the spot, and looked up, but the President had already retired.

Indeed that *was* agreeable intelligence. That bad man richly deserved his fate, I did not pity him the least, the tell-tale—the mischief-maker!

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS.

‘ Good words are silver, but good deeds are gold.’



CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS.

THE fresh air, the movement of the people outside in the street, even the biting cold of the winter wind, did me good ; and, for a few short moments at least, gave another direction to my sorrowful thoughts.

It was about eight o'clock. The children were tripping along to school. With what happy rosy faces the little creatures hurried on, carrying their books and satchels. Poor little Nina !

I began reflecting how I could best manage it—to keep the fate of her parents concealed from her, and to guard her from any harsh touch.

I went on, my hands buried deep in my pockets, without looking to the right or left. I was just crossing the principal street, when I heard my name called behind me.

‘Herr Bagdanoff! Herr Bagdanoff!’

I looked round and saw a man enveloped in furs hastening after me; he was a retired bookseller, who passed his time in making acquaintances and picking up gossip. I scarcely knew the man, and did not look very pleasantly at him.

‘What do you want?’ I said shortly; ‘I am in a hurry.’

‘ Good heavens !’ he cried breathlessly, ‘ have you heard the terrible news ? Only fancy, the Baroness Maszmann — that beautiful lady so universally adored—that she, yesterday evening, in conjunction with her lover, should have murdered her husband !’

Angry and terrified, I hastened on to avoid hearing more. So the sparrows upon the housetops have proclaimed it already ! I raised my fist and shook it furiously. It is true, they are vermin ; they feed on the carcasses of others. And yet, as the poet says :

‘ Und möcht’ ich sie zusammenschmeizen
Könnt’ ich sie doch nicht Lügner heissen !’

During my short walk to the Golden

Rose, I met about a dozen of these professional idlers, in whom W—— is so rich ; all had heard it already, and all told it me in different styles. Some spoke with honest regret ; others, who take pleasure in the unhappiness of their fellow-creatures, and have the gratification of feeling themselves better men when they see others fall, seemed full of malicious joy.

It was like running the gauntlet.

Half an hour later I had safely conveyed the little one and her governess to the Princess's house, in a close carriage. I told the child that her parents had gone to Heidelberg for two or three days, and would soon be back ; she would, meanwhile, stay with the Princess. She believed my words with childlike confidence. I had

already, by a short note, made my motherly friend acquainted with what had happened, and begged her protection for Nina. I was not mistaken in her ; she was ready to welcome her a thousand times, and to offer her a place of refuge.

All was well managed. Fräulein von Weber was soon upstairs with the child, and I hastened to the Princess, for I knew how anxiously she awaited me.

Tatiana, her Russian waiting-maid, stood at the door with the handle in her hand.

‘Her Highness is already up,’ she whispered in my ear as an astonishing piece of news ; ‘she is waiting for you, and has rung the bell two or three times.’

She drew back the curtain, and I found myself in the well-known sanctum.

It was true—that unheard-of thing had taken place—as early as nine o'clock the Princess had left her bed. A woollen handkerchief was twisted over her night-cap, and hung down upon her shoulders; her pale, expressive features were agitated with surprise and emotion; she was rubbing her thin white hands nervously together.

She rose hastily from her sofa when she perceived me.

‘So, Nicolas Seminitsh Bagdanoff, you are come at last,’ she said reproachfully, as she stepped towards me.

I kissed her hand.

‘Yes, I am come, your Highness,’ I answered, with a deep sigh. Then our eyes met. She was as sad, as deeply ap-

prehensive as myself, and in her eyes lay the same question : Can it be possible ?

‘Can it be possible, tell me ?’ she said softly, holding my hand firmly in hers, with dilated pupils fixed upon me.

‘Speak, Nicolas—tell me—what has happened ? The Baroness ! Mélanie ! I cannot believe it, even though the fearful thing assumes the highest probability. No, I have lived too long in the world to be mistaken in a face. No, Mélanie is not guilty—I would lay my head upon the block for her. And yet—it is a sad, sad business !’

The Princess was so agitated that, without knowing it, and quite contrary to her usual custom, she spoke these last words to me in Russian. She had lived so long

abroad that she had almost forgotten how to use her mother tongue. But in moments of great excitement one's native language comes back again spontaneously.

She gazed at me inquiringly with her large expressive eyes, her lips trembled; she seemed quite old and broken down, like the grandmother in the old German legend.

How good and noble she looked, the dear old lady! She was really more handsome and venerable in her quaint costume this morning than when driving in full state to court; so much had compassion and sympathy ennobled and beautified her.

I led her to a seat. What could I say to her? Indeed, I knew nothing—nothing

certain. My head was a chaos, my heart a desert. Wretched feelings of doubt, of aversion, filled my soul. Yesterday evening I should have thought and spoken just as the Princess had done. I would have gone through fire and water for that unhappy woman, but to-day——’

‘I pray your Highness be seated—calm yourself, Olga Petrowna!’ I implored, in some embarrassment.

‘And why did you not send me a line yesterday evening? I would have gone to her assistance, dear, unhappy creature! I learnt it only this morning. Terror struck me, I trembled in all my limbs. But, I pray you, tell me something, Nicolas.’

She buried herself in the cushions as if

shivering with cold, and I began my story. I related to her simply, in order, what I had seen and experienced.

The Princess sat there and listened to me. The dancing flame on the hearth lighted up her anxious, wrinkled face, giving it a strange appearance in the grey twilight of the winter morning, which struggled feebly into the room through the thick curtains. Her head sank lower and lower, her hands were pressed close together, and her whole frame seemed to shrink with fear.

Now and then an exclamation of terror and compassion escaped her thin, compressed lips, and her eyes, unnaturally large, were fixed upon my mouth, as if she would anticipate my words.

When I mentioned the scene with the Hofmarschall, she became quite excited.

‘Ah, the *canaille!*’ she murmured, with uncontrolled scorn, ‘may Heaven strike him!’

To the proceedings of the President she nodded approbation, and muttered now and then :

‘Good character—kind-hearted man!’

She accompanied all my narrative with expressive words and gestures.

While I was telling my tale, my looks involuntarily wandered round the large room ; it had a strange look. In the background stood the high bed, the contour of which indicated that the Princess had not long left it ; near it was her watch and the night-light still burning. Fanchon and Boabdil, the two dogs of the Princess, lay

on some parts of their mistress's attire, which were on the carpet, their noses between their paws. They were accustomed, like their mistress, to sleep until five o'clock, so that at this early hour in the morning it was still the depth of the night to them. Close by the fireside, upon a chair, was a large black-bound book with gold leaves. I was amazed—the Princess, that free-thinker! Yes, without doubt, it was a Prayer-book, I saw the slope of the gold cross upon its cover. The Princess had been praying.

Yes, be we ever such sceptics, still, somewhere, under our worldly trifles, hidden in a corner, lies the good old book of our childhood; and when the soul is overwhelmed with anguish, then we fetch

it forth and seek confidence and strength from its simple words.

To each one of us there come hours in life when all philosophy fails; when the best system breaks down—is blown away like chaff; when the hands are folded almost involuntarily in prayer; when the eyes are raised on high, and the heart flies to its God.

And you also, child of the world, behind that mask, at the bottom of your noble human heart, the fountain of religion is springing still. How very much must the Princess have taken to heart the unhappiness of the Baroness!

As I spoke of the sight in the room, and of that stranger, she looked up and fixed her eyes upon me.

‘Good heavens!’ she murmured, and raised herself from her stooping posture. ‘What was he like, Nicolas?’ she asked hastily. ‘And she—Mélanie—is it possible?—bending over that man, while her husband lay bleeding upon the floor! Good God!’

I continued my story, and she sank back, looking older and more broken down than before. I only related the bare facts, and refrained from giving any opinion; I was anxious to know what inference the Princess would draw from them.

She let me speak quietly to the end, without interrupting me, and when I had finished, remained for a short time in deep reflection.

At last something glittered in her eyes—Olga Petrowna was weeping, the tears

rolled down her furrowed cheeks. I turned away, I could not look at her, for I had never seen her weep.

‘Nicolas,’ she began, after some moments of profound silence, ‘this is a fearful tale. The finger of God is here. Mélanie is indeed in a desperate position. Whatever may happen—however this mystery may be solved—she is deeply to be pitied! Many will condemn her—will consider her guilty. Ah, who is without guilt, Nicolas? I do not judge her—I do not believe that this lovely woman can be an outcast—a murderess! No murderess ever looked like that! If all turn against her, I will stand by her. In my heart a voice speaks loudly: “She is innocent of such a crime!” Do you not know that a woman, even

the best, can err? When she feels the intoxication of passion; when love, like a whirlwind, sweeps over her, the firmest principles are sometimes uprooted!—ah, I have seen that, during the seventy years I have now lived in this world.'

What a wonder it was, to hear the Princess confess her age!

'Yes—all of us err, even the best, but they err nobly. They are more to be pitied than condemned! Yes—whatever miserable knaves may say — woman's honour, woman's virtue, still holds sway in this world—yes, indeed. Listen to me, Nicolas. Such eyes as hers cannot lie; such a voice cannot be false. She bears God's seal, the seal of purity, on her brow. Some terrible mystery is concealed here—some

dreadful secret, Nicolas. It must be so—poor unhappy Mélanie! Take me to her—call Tatiana—I will speak to her—I will help her! I will act towards her according to the commandment of God and the example of the saints!

It was a thing incredible that the Princess should think of driving out at this early hour, and without having made her toilette. I was much moved, and taking her hand, bent over it in reverence.

‘Olga Petrowna, you are an angel of goodness,’ I said, with emotion. ‘Yes, come with me; the sight of you will give her comfort. Let us still hope!’

At this moment the image of the Baroness again stood before me, pure and clean as one of the angels. The confidence

of the Princess had also inspired me. But afterwards, when I stood at the window, waiting, gazing out into the grey morning, the scenes of the night came back to me with redoubled force ; doubt and disquietude pressed heavily upon my soul.

A closed carriage quickly brought us to the house. The President of police came to the gate himself to speak to the Princess, but he had nothing consoling to communicate ; indeed, he would not permit her to see the Baroness, as she was then under examination. So, our mission of mercy unfulfilled, we were obliged to return.

The Princess spoke not a word on our way back, but sat with firmly-closed lips, with the hood of her sable cloak drawn over her face.

As we alighted from the carriage, we perceived another standing before her hotel.

She looked up. 'Is that the doctor, dear Ellen?' she asked.

It was not the doctor.

Above, on the first floor, we found the Countess Draunfels and the Baroness Zumberg, engaged in a violent altercation with Tatiana, who was preventing their entrance.

'But I tell you, you foolish girl, that I must absolutely speak with her Highness!' cried the Countess, violently, attempting to push the maid aside just as we came up.

'Here I am, what do you want with me?' asked the Princess in a distinct voice, with a queenly air.

The two ladies started in terror, and began to apologise.

‘Oh, no excuses, ladies,’ she answered condescendingly; ‘as you say that you must speak to me, I pray you enter.’

At a gesture from the Princess they sat down. We were in the large salon, which had not yet been heated.

Both ladies were still a little overawed by the grand air of the Princess, but the desire to impart their news was considerably stronger than their timidity.

Fräulein Zumberg had scarcely seated herself upon the sofa, when she burst forth:

‘Oh, heavens! Your Highness! Can it be true? You know it already, you have heard this dreadful news! Good heavens! what a scandal! How it must have over-

whelmed you! Yes—I have long seen it coming.’

She spoke with great energy, in the way peculiar to old maids and gossips.

‘Yes, indeed—how it must have overwhelmed you, dear Princess!’ here interrupted the Countess, turning up the whites of her eyes hypocritically. ‘We came here immediately—we wished to inquire how your Highness bore this terrible blow—your precious health——’

A commanding gesture from the Princess suddenly shut both their mouths, though afterwards they literally remained open.

The Princess rose with the dignity of a queen.

‘Ladies,’ she said coldly, ‘you follow a miserable profession. A grave-digger’s

occupation is a respectable one in comparison with yours ; *he* buries the dead and plants flowers on their graves—*you*, on the contrary—— But enough, I had almost forgotten myself. Adieu, ladies ! Nicolas, your arm.'

We heard some bustle outside, and five minutes later the roll of a departing carriage. Those two charitable Samaritans were continuing their rounds through the town.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOFMARSCHALL VON BÜCKING.

‘ My plots thrive not ; my engines all deceive me,
And in the very point of their discharge
Recoil with danger to myself.’



CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOFMARSCHALL VON BÜCKING.

HALF an hour later I found myself once more in the Garden Road.

As I drew near the place, the whole street seemed alive; at every step I was stopped and questioned.

‘You were always a friend of the Baron’s,’ or, ‘Have you heard the dreadful news?’ or, ‘Ah! one cannot trust those fair faces.’ So they spoke, trying to detain me.

What abominable pleasure some people

take in scandal! How eagerly will they hasten to the scene of misfortune, and revel in the details, especially if noble ladies are concerned. Are there, then, so many evil hearts in the world?

Before the house in which the fearful event had taken place, groups of people were assembled, conversing in agitated, awestruck whispers. Every time the door opened, all their looks were eagerly directed towards it, and every neck was stretched out. They were not the rabble alone who stood here, and who were restrained only by the presence of two policemen from taking the house by storm; no—there were many well-dressed people, men and women, standing for hours up to their ankles in snow, watching for the smallest

piece of news. Many of them, presuming upon their position in society, attempted by threats or persuasions to obtain an entrance. But the policemen had received the strictest orders to keep every one out, whoever they might be.

There arose much murmuring and discontent among the crowd when they saw me permitted to pass.

‘All have an equal right here, Herr Commissary! Why do you allow that gentleman to enter, and keep me out? Do you not know who I am?’ exclaimed an angry voice.

‘Bagdanoff! Herr Bagdanoff!’ I heard another calling behind me, ‘one moment!’

I took no notice, but entered the house.

In a room especially appropriated to him, the President of police received me.

‘I am glad that you have come,’ he said ; ‘you must relieve me here for an hour. The examination is just over, and I must hasten to the Prince, to obtain his Highness’s commands regarding our friend von Bücking. Sit down.’

‘And how is it here now?’ I asked anxiously.

‘There is nothing consoling to report,’ he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

We sat silently for a moment, then he began again.

‘I was going to tell you something about this same brave Hofmarschall. Listen, dear friend.

‘The scoundrel has for some time past

owed me a score, for, besides his ordinary mischief-making, he has meddled with other things which have brought him into the power of the law. You know the police have sharp eyes ; they can see through wood and stone. He has for some time carried on a lucrative trade in special things—Hungarian wine, spice, etc.’

‘How?’ I asked in astonishment.

‘Ah, you think that extraordinary, do you? And yet it is exactly as I have said.’

Until now I had listened to him somewhat absently, for my thoughts were with the unhappy creatures upstairs. I was listening for the slightest noise, only hearing his words with half an ear ; but now I began to pay more attention. The

Hofmarschall a dealer in foreign goods! How was that possible?

‘Listen,’ continued the President, with a serious air; ‘we have, as you know, a half-Austrian, half-Bavarian garrison in the neighbourhood of B——; it is an allied fortress, and, according to ancient usage, the soldiers receive their provisions and other necessities free of duty.’

‘Bücking had once been in the Austrian service, and came here, a poor devil, to make his fortune at our court. You have already heard how very much our Prince Paul inclines to Austria; he smiles if he only hears the Styrian language; he says it reminds him of the happy days of his youth, and of everything charming. It is even whispered that his first boyish love

was given to a Styrian maiden. In short, Bücking established himself at court; and he succeeded the more easily, because the cunning fellow came here in company with a sister, a gay and not very scrupulous lady, who spoke Styrian to perfection—the present Countess W ——.’

I gave utterance to an involuntary exclamation. I had already heard of this lady. She was now the extremely pious wife of an exceedingly bigoted nobleman. She had once spent a winter in St. Petersburg. In a very charitable judgment she might be a convert, but at that time she was the gayest of the gay, and very strange things were related of her.

The President of police looked attentively at me for a second, with a gleam

of intelligence in his eye, then he continued :

‘Well, Bagdanoff, this fellow was made gentleman of the bed-chamber, with a salary of six hundred gulden ; he had previously been employed in our bureau, where we had learnt to know him.

‘The Bückings are without a kreuzer of fortune, as bare as the palm of my hand, and six hundred gulden is a poor income for a young man who has many wants, and is, besides, over head and ears in debt.

‘Our intelligent gentleman hit upon a very brilliant idea to assist his embarrassed circumstances. He had still some connection with his Austrian comrades in B——, and this he made use of in a very ingenious way. Upon the pretext of

becoming better acquainted with the management of the official service, he went for several months to Unkstein, where the ducal estates are situated. The pretty sister at the same time paid a visit to an old schoolfellow, the wife of one of the captains belonging to the border regiment. As might be expected, his sister being so near, Herr Bücking rode daily from Unkstein to B—— to see her. A short time afterwards, the commander of the regiment noticed that the consumption of spice in the household of some of his officers had increased enormously. At last, the colonel sent for one of the officers, and questioned him on the subject.

“How is it, captain, that you have four

hundredweight and a half of spice this month?" he inquired sternly.

“Your pardon, colonel, I wanted it.”

“But I really cannot understand——”

“Your pardon, colonel, my wife and I eat spice at all our meals.”

‘The colonel looked very serious, and enjoined the captain, for his own interests, to lessen his consumption of spice for the future, or he should be compelled to transfer him to some garrison in the interior.

‘This was stopped for the present, but it did not much improve matters, for now the trade commenced with Hungarian wines, sugar, and other taxed articles. This continued for several years, and when the authorities at last succeeded in putting

down this contraband trade, it was found that Bücking had managed so craftily that nothing could be proved against him. I alone possessed sufficient evidence to convict him, but till now have made no use of it, because the fellow was attached to the court, and his sister had married into one of the best families in the land—it was not my business to make a scandal! It is a good thing, also, with such people as Bücking, to keep something back which may serve as a check.

‘I therefore kept the line in my hand, so as to be able to draw the noose round the scoundrel’s neck, in case, at any time, he should go too far. Yesterday I drew it tight, and he now sits behind iron bars, with plenty of time to meditate on his past

life. You should have seen what a face he made, when my men fetched him out from his game of cards: "Herr Hofmarschall von Bücking, I arrest you for speculation and fraud!"

'It was as if a spark had fallen into a powder magazine; he stormed and raved—he would go to the Prince—he would protest his innocence, and call all the world to witness. But it was all of no use, we were cruel enough not to believe him; he was led away to prison, and there safely guarded.

'But I must hasten away to see the Prince; he will be very much astonished at what I have to tell him.'

He went out, and left me alone; I watched him down the street, and saw

how he was assailed on all sides by questions. With a stern gesture he shook off the troublesome idlers, and jumped into a carriage waiting close by, which immediately drove off.

It began to snow, the crowd outside dispersed a little.

I sat alone for a quarter of an hour in the little room, looking gloomily out into the whirlwind of falling flakes; then my presence was requested by the magistrate, that he might examine me.

The Baron von Maszmann still lay in the same condition, hovering between life and death. The American could not be interrogated, the physician having strictly forbidden it. The Baroness, overcome by bodily suffering and distress of mind, had

fallen into a deep swoon. The magistrate had asked her if she confessed that she was the murderer of her husband.

Pale as death, she had uttered a scarcely audible 'Yes.'

'Then it was you, yourself, who directed the weapon upon him?'

The unhappy lady had drawn herself up, wavered for a moment, then, with a fearful cry, had fallen like a broken reed.

So the mystery still remained unsolved. The Köhlers, the servant-maid and myself, could throw but little light upon it.

The woman of the house deposed, that towards evening the bell was violently pulled, and when she opened the door, a tall man, wrapped in furs, stood before her.

‘I am the Baron von Maszmann: I am come to fetch my wife,’ he said, and with a hasty salute passed up the stairs. She gazed after him in some surprise, thinking to herself, that must surely be the husband of the lady who comes here to wait on the sick gentleman.

Standing below, she heard the door open and shut, and the report of the pistol immediately followed.

The magistrate could elicit nothing further, and was obliged to leave. The house was strictly watched. The Doctor and I alone remained on the upper floor, in charge of those three unhappy creatures under the penalty of the law or of death.

No one besides ourselves was admitted.

Madame Köhler undertook the care of the Baroness.

Such was the state of affairs, and thus they remained for several days. Justice, as well as curiosity, was obliged to wait.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWSPAPER SCANDAL.

‘’Tis pleasant, too, to see one’s words in print ;
A book’s a book, although there’s nothing in’t.’



CHAPTER IX.

THE NEWSPAPER SCANDAL.

IN the afternoon of that day the President returned ; with a somewhat excited air he entered the little room in which I had installed myself. He looked upon me with a self-satisfied smile, for which I should hardly have given him credit, as he was usually a grave and kindly man.

‘Heaven and earth ! I have plunged into a wasp’s nest !’ he exclaimed.

I looked at him, without comprehending.

‘Let me sit down, and light a cigar, Bagdanoff, for I have been on my legs since yesterday morning; and then I will tell you the whole story.’

He lighted his cigar, while I sat as if upon hot coals; then he continued:

‘You know that yesterday evening I gave strict orders to the editors of our newspapers to make no mention in their morning’s issue of the drama that had taken place in this house, especially as the official investigation had not yet been completed.

‘I did this chiefly out of regard to the court, to whom it must be in the highest degree painful to see discussed in the papers a scandal, with such a terrible issue, concerning persons of their own immediate

circle. I thought also of the unhappy creatures here, and was convinced that, in time, the mystery might be elucidated. I had no doubt that my commands would be obeyed, especially as I have always behaved with great courtesy towards the editors. Well, this morning, as I was driving to the Palace, I found that I had been deceived. We have here a little insignificant journal called the *Mittwoch Magasin*, conducted by an obscure individual without culture, and of doubtful morals. How on earth people can read his twaddle I cannot imagine !

‘Monsieur Fröhlich, as the editor calls himself, was for some time croupier at Homburg, and carried on a private trade in jewellery and ornaments, which embar-

rassed gamblers, especially female ones, brought to him for sale. He lost this post and came to W——, where he set up this newspaper. He lives by scandal ; he is an uneducated fellow, and cannot write an article, but frequents wine-shops and beer-houses to pick up little bits of gossip. He has also agents of the lowest kind, and there are others who endeavour, through his journal, to wound their neighbours with secret arrows.

‘ I have long wished to suppress this paper, but in vain, for these little courts are centres of trifling and chattering, especially this one of W——.

‘ But, strange to say, this review of his has often contained articles written by a very clever pen, evidently emanating

from some one far above the editor in social position. These articles have excited much attention, even in the highest circles ; we have often tried to discover the author, but Herr Fröhlich has never betrayed him.

‘ This morning a copy of the paper was handed to me fresh from the press, in which the sad event here was detailed in full, with comments of the most abominable character. I immediately had the printing-office closed, the editor arrested, and his house searched. I myself undertook the examination ; the result was extraordinary. At first I had to fight against stubborn denial, with all kinds of evasion and subterfuge. But suddenly the fellow changed his tone. He became as white as a sheet

when one of my officers, a very clever man, brought in a large packet of papers and letters which he had found in a secret drawer. Herr Fröhlich was now as cringing and servile as he had before been insolent; he found himself in deep water, and in his anxiety was willing to confess everything.

‘I broke open the packet — good heavens! what strange things came to light. Upon my word of honour I was astounded. I found there letters, articles, drafts from people of all ranks and classes — from people who would think themselves insulted if you looked them in the face and said: “Do you write for the *Mittwoch Magasin*?” What will not men do when they are impelled by malice, by revenge,

by love of gossip, even by the silly desire to see their tales in print, if it can only be done in secret, without exposure. This writing anonymous letters, this fighting with the pen instead of the sword, what a cancer it is !

‘Well, dear Bagdanoff, I brought a whole collection to light. I shall be able to trace most of the authors, and I will gibbet them without mercy’

‘Certainly,’ said I, ‘you will only treat them as they deserve. Such persons belong to the pillory. But what a want of principle in the editor ! What a betrayal of his fellow-workers ! Why had he not burnt the manuscripts ? He must have assured the writers that they should be destroyed.’

‘Ah, my friend,’ said the President, ‘he kept them as an effective weapon, that he might use them for his own purposes. If only our friend Bücking could have imagined what would happen! Only think, I found about a dozen letters and articles in his well-known hand, which gave me the most complete evidence that all these piquant tales of scandal, which have been circulating so freely and disturbing the peace of our town for so long, emanated chiefly from him.

‘With what a clever pen the fellow wrote, dipped in gall and venom! Now with a harmless word, now with a simple sentence, he knew how to inflict mortal wounds. If he only could have imagined that these arrows would be turned against

himself, he would rather have cut off his hand than have discharged them. Even the most crafty men sometimes outwit themselves.

‘What a splendid weapon he has now placed in my hands to effect his own ruin with the Prince!

‘Some time ago there appeared in this very journal a little harmless tale written in the country dialect. It seemed very innocent, and yet it created the greatest uproar throughout the whole land, and so irritated the Prince himself that he caused the most searching inquiries to be made for the author. It was attributed then to a woman, on account of several intimations and insinuations. To-day I learn that this

scandalous tale came from the pen of our good Bücking.'

'It is not possible!' I cried.

'You are right,' said he, 'it is hardly credible, but it is none the less true. This proceeding of the Hofmarschall was as unwise as it was ungrateful, for the Prince drew him out of obscurity, and can soon send him back into it again. He is now a wealthy man, and his sister is Countess W——; but he has ruined himself by the mean desire of gratifying his own malice and spreading his secret venom.

'Besides these letters of the Hofmarschall, I found several other very interesting documents, grammatical and ungrammatical—letters from ladies in all ranks of

society, true masterpieces of malice. Among them were some little notes from the ladies Draunfels and Zumberg!

‘Oh! that is grand.’

‘Just so; and very interesting little documents they are. I hastened at once to the Palace with my prize. I will not deny to you, dear Bagdanoff, that I was received a little ungraciously. This unhappy event, and the arrest of the Hofmarschall, had very much excited the Prince, but I came away in triumph. The tables were turned when I drew my papers from my pocket and accompanied them with a full explanation. His Highness was astounded. I never saw him so angry.

‘The result is that the scoundrel will

undergo the penalty of the law without mercy. He is deprived of all his offices and dignities, and loses his pension besides. Monsieur Fröhlich also receives his well-deserved punishment; his newspaper is suppressed, and he is exiled from the land.

An hour ago, by the order of the Lord Steward, the two ladies, whose names you know, were forbidden to appear at court.

‘At first his Highness insisted that all these pamphlets and anonymous letters should be published, with the names of the authors attached. It was with the greatest difficulty I induced him to abandon this idea, and he only yielded when I pointed

out to him what a train of evil, duels, law-suits, might possibly arise.

‘So, my friend, this is the great news I bring you, a whole sackful. I am glad to have unmasked so much wickedness; my heart swells with loathing and aversion when I think of it. How bad the world is!’

‘It is everywhere the same,’ I answered sadly, ‘the world and mankind. But believe me, dear friend, it is not worse here in W—— than elsewhere. On the contrary, I have found that in this place a trait of openness, of amiability, runs through all classes of the people, which charms the stranger, and makes him feel that he will soon be at home here.’

We were interrupted. The Doctor

wished to speak to the President. The Baron's state was so bad that one might expect his death at any moment.

CHAPTER X.

SUSPENSE.

‘Closing in deadliest night and gloom
Long hours of aching, dumb suspense.’



CHAPTER X.

SUSPENSE.

WHILE I was thus shut up as a captive in the little house, going from one room to the other in care and anxiety, while, heavy as lead, the hours rolled by in monotonous succession, outside in the town the waves of curiosity and excitement rose to a great height.

Society was stirred to its very depths—the earth seemed to tremble—the waters surged and foamed—surprise followed sur-

prise! The murder in the Garden Road, the arrest of the Hofmarschall, which seemed connected with it, and about which extraordinary tales were told; then, upon this, the other arrest, the house-searchings, the suspension of the newspaper, the banishment of the two courtiers; these events, multiplied a thousandfold by confused and exaggerated reports, made a chaos in the town of W——. On all sides were to be seen countenances scowling with malice or pallid with fear.

Something of this excitement penetrated even to my quiet room.

The President came now and then to keep me company for an hour, and make me *au courant* with the State news. The Princess also wrote to me daily one or two

of her original notes, which I answered as often, but could not impart to her any fresh information, or anything which might tranquillise her feelings.

Doctor Wilhelmi told me that it was a wonder the Baron lived at all, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a wound of that sort proved absolutely fatal. He also shook his head very anxiously with regard to the mysterious stranger and the condition of the Baroness. His face became daily more foreboding of evil.

He said that the whole nervous system of the American was totally upset, either from excess or from severe mental suffering, or perhaps from both combined. The spring of his existence seemed to be de-

cayed, and he feared for his life almost as much as for that of the Baron.

And the Baroness? Like a tortured spirit she glided from one sick-room to the other. Silent, almost distracted, she would sit with clasped hands beside her husband's couch, gaze despairingly at his stony features, and listen tearlessly to the slight noise of his breathing. Then suddenly a restless change would come over her. Directing her gaze anxiously towards the door, she would listen like a mother who hears her child cry; then rising, with a slight moan, she would hasten from her husband's dying bed straight to that pale stranger, who lay close by in a state of unconsciousness.

She would throw herself upon him with

passionate ardour, hold him fast in a close embrace, call him by his name, implore him not to die for her sake, and then sink at last on her knees by his bedside, there to remain hour after hour, murmuring fervent prayers.

It was as terrible as it was mysterious.

In spite of the most careful inquiry, not the least evidence resulted which could aid in a solution of the riddle.

I myself, as well as the President and the Doctor, racked our brains in vain to discover any clue. We searched the whole house and made every investigation, nowhere could we find any evidence which might guide us to a right conclusion. The main facts seemed clear; that the Baron had found his wife by the couch of that

sick man ; that, after a moment's struggle with himself, he had turned the pistol against his own heart, and fired. The impression on the glove was still unaccountable.

The frenzied cry of the Baroness, 'I have killed him ! I have killed him !' might mean that she herself had fired the shot and killed her husband ; or it might equally mean that she was only the moral cause of this murder, or suicide. It was indeed inconceivable that a delicately-nurtured woman should in a moment seize a pistol from her husband's hand and become his murderess.

So passed day after day in fruitless anxiety and uncertainty.

Outside, matters progressed with more

rapid steps. The Hofmarschall was convicted. In spite of his plausibility, in spite of open and hidden threats of being able to compromise persons in the highest society, in spite of denials and entreaties, he received his sentence. He was deprived of his offices, fined a large sum of money, and sent for three years to the State prison of Limburg. The editor got off with six months' imprisonment and exile.

Countess Draunfels and Baroness Zumberg left W—— under cover of the night. Later on they revenged themselves, in their own way, by publishing a little book at Vienna, full of gossip and slander, and bearing the significant title: 'Prince Zero and his Court ; or, Highly interesting Revelations from the Great World.'

Those who bought the book, deluded by its title, might as well have thrown their money in the dirt. It contained nothing but dull falsehood and weary gossip—a true woman's revenge.

The Prince was magnanimous enough to continue the pension of two hundred gulden to Baroness Zumberg, which he still paid her.

END OF VOL. I.

THE MARRIAGE TIE.

From the German of

JOHANNES VON DEWALL.

BY

K. E. STANTIAL.

‘As gold is tried by the fire
So the heart must be tried by pain.’

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL II.

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THE MARRIAGE TIE.



CHAPTER I.

LIGHT IN THE GLOOM.

‘Then followed counsel, comfort, and the words
That make a man feel strong in speaking truth.’



THE MARRIAGE TIE.



CHAPTER I.

LIGHT IN THE GLOOM.

THE care of the two sick people occupied all my time and attention. The greater part of the day I spent in the Baron's room, giving him his medicine, and handing him the cooling drinks, for which he so often stretched out his burning hand. During the nights, also, I watched alternately by his bed.

He seemed to recognise me, but he could not speak; the wound prevented him, for when the bandage was removed, the air poured out of his shattered lung.

Frequently, also, I sat by the bed of the stranger, who lay there, pale and wasted, like a waxen image—an object of compassion.

I had conceived a strong prejudice against this man, a bitter aversion. What a wretch he must be, to have led such a woman astray! He had shaken my belief in virtue and womanhood—had robbed me!

Good God! How was it possible that the unhappy lady could love this man—love him even to madness! With what eyes does a woman see! Handsome,

intellectual, distinguished men had offered their homage to her, had laid themselves at her feet, had striven for a glance from her dark eyes. With one look she had repulsed them, coldly, haughtily! And now?—unfortunate fascination!—now she had given her heart away to this pitiable object, had thrown it after a shadow! Was it conceivable—was it possible so to love this man, upon whom Death already seemed to have laid his hand? Or, are pity and love so closely connected in a woman's heart?

In the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' Shakespeare makes Titania fall in love with an ass—that is a play of the imagination. But was not the reality here even more strange, more fantastical?

These yellow, emaciated features ; this mass of tangled hair ; this rough, grey-besprinkled beard ; these hollow cheeks ; these sunken eyes surrounded by deep shadows—how could a woman see these without feeling something like horror ?

My gaze dwelt long and inquiringly upon those pale features, not only in the bright light of day, but also during the long hours of the night, when I sat quietly by his couch ; while the monotonous tick of the clock alone broke the death-like stillness, and the glimmer of the night-lamp sparsely illumined the darkness.

In vain I sought the solution of the enigma ; I found it nowhere.

It was but very gradually that I felt my first impression of aversion pass away, but

after a time I looked at him with other eyes. I now discovered that, in spite of the wasted expression, the features were noble, the forehead was highly arched, the nose fine and well cut. There was something very touching, very expressive, in the look of those deep-sunken eyes when the heavy blue-veined lids were raised for a moment.

But where could she have learnt to know him? Where could he have obtained such power over her? How had it all happened?

So I thought, so I asked myself, for hours together, while the clock, with monotonous strokes, marked the course of time. But all still remained wrapped in the same impenetrable darkness.

And must it always be so?

No! God be praised! Light came at last—light to illumine the gloom.

One morning the Doctor came to me with a very excited air.

‘A wonder!’ he cried; ‘the Baron is better. He has taken something to eat, his eye is clearer, he seems to have regained full consciousness. Come with me, and see for yourself.’

When we entered the sick-room, the Baron lay with his eyes wide open. He immediately fixed his look upon me; it was evident that he knew me; the expression of his countenance changed, and he attempted with a feeble movement to stretch out his hands to me.

I was deeply touched by that look—it

said so plainly : ‘So this is how you find me again, an unhappy, a dying man.’

I stepped up to the bed, bent down, and laid my hand upon his.

‘How are you—what can I do for you?’ I asked, with emotion.

He seemed to wish to raise himself, to say something, but he could only move his head, for a cough, which brought the blood-stained foam to his lips, immediately stopped his utterance. Impatiently he wrinkled his brow, damp from weakness, still looking at me, as if to say : ‘You see how it is.’

He lay thus quiet for a time, holding my hand in his, and I could hear the sound of the air rattling through his wounded lung.

My heart bled for him, I dared not speak, and looked mournfully from the Baron to the Doctor. The latter gave him a spoonful of lemonade, and said emphatically :

‘You must not excite yourself in the least, if you wish to get well.’

The sick man appeared not to hear his words ; he stared gloomily before him for a short space, then suddenly pressed my hand again, and signified his wish to write something.

While I was seeking the pencil and paper, I thought, with an oppression at my heart : In mercy, what are we about to learn ?

The Baron wrote.

We both watched him, the Doctor and

I ; we had the same thought—what fearful thing will be revealed to us ?

With much exertion he traced several lines on the paper, slowly and feebly, his features still retaining their former expression of gloom. At last his hand fell languidly on the coverlet, and he looked at me with an expression of deep sorrow.

‘ Shall I take the paper ? ’ I inquired.

He made a weak attempt to hand it to me.

‘ Shall I read it ? ’

His eyes looked ‘ Yes.’

With a trembling hand I seized the important paper ; my heart almost stopped beating. I read :

‘ I myself am the author of my death.

It was an unfortunate accident. The pistol slipped from my hand as I stepped over the threshold, and went off as it struck the ground. I swear this, on my honour.'

One can imagine how I felt, what a burden was lifted from my soul, as I glanced at these lines.

'God be ever praised and thanked!' I exclaimed, with eyes raised on high. 'So this is the solution of the mystery!'

I had first read it to myself, then I read it aloud. The Baron's eyes were fixed with an almost agonised expression, now upon me, now upon the Doctor. When I had finished reading he raised his hand slightly with the fingers outspread, as if

taking his oath, then let it fall heavily upon the bed.

There he lay for some time, while we were speechless from agitation. He pointed first to his wounded breast, and then upwards, as if calling Heaven to witness that the words he had written were the truth.

‘Must I die?’ he inquired at last, by a gesture which we understood.

The Doctor bent down to him and said :

‘Your wound is very dangerous, Baron, but not absolutely mortal ; if you will guard yourself from any agitation, there is a possibility that we may save you.’

The hand upon the bed moved backwards and forwards, as if in unbelief.

‘Will you not write something more,

Baron ?' I asked, 'or shall I add something for you ?'

He understood me ; he lay still for a while, with damp brow and compressed lips, in conflict with himself. Once more he signed for the pencil.

There was deep stillness in the room—slowly his hand moved over the paper, now stopping a moment, now continuing to trace the characters.

At last it was done. I took the paper and read ;

' My last will remains unaltered—it is deposited at Riga—I forgive all mankind—even my wife !'

He raised his head slightly, then let it

fall back heavily and painfully ; his eyes closed.

The Doctor beckoned me on one side.

‘ For Heaven’s sake !’ he said, ‘ the most absolute rest now, otherwise I will not be answerable for the consequences.’ He drew me towards the door, adding, in a whisper : ‘ Let us rejoice that we have this,’ pointing to the paper.

‘ What a favour from Heaven !’ I murmured, as I went out ; ‘ this bit of paper is worth all the treasures in the world. Let us both put our names to it, and I will hasten to the Baroness and the President.’

‘ What has happened ?’ said a voice behind me.

I turned, and saw the Baroness with her large, gleaming eyes fixed anxiously upon me.

I seized her hand.

‘Let us thank God,’ I said, with much emotion, and led her to her room.

‘Read here, gracious lady.’

She sank into a chair ; her gaze wandered quickly over the paper ; she heaved a deep sigh ; her eyes filled with tears.

‘Even my wife !’ she groaned.

‘Dear lady !’ I said, deeply touched.

She looked at me for a moment through a veil of tears—a look of heavy sorrow, of deep reproach ; then she turned away her head, made a movement with her hand as if to keep me back, and with trembling steps left the room.

‘Lovely, unhappy being!’ my lips murmured, and I could have sunk on my knees and pressed my lips to the spot which her foot had touched—have implored her to pardon me. For now I felt assured, now I was certain as if an angel had told me: This woman is innocent!

The mystery shall be solved, it shall be my most eager endeavour to unravel it; nor will I rest, day or night, until I have found the key.

I stood there for a time severely blaming myself, and yet, at the same moment, rejoicing that I had once more regained my faith.

I lifted up the paper, which had fallen to the ground; I kissed the tear-stains upon

it, and hastened at once to the Princess and the President to show them this invaluable document, and to say to them, 'The Baroness is innocent!'

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

‘I strove to pierce a mystery,
And lo ! the clue is given.’



CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

So passed several days. Curiosity was still at its height in the town.

So the Baron had wounded himself by an unlucky accident, they said. Well! But how had that happened? Granted, that the pistol had fallen from his hand, and in the sudden movement had gone off as it struck the ground—nothing more probable.

But how came it that the Baron had

entered the other man's room at all with a pistol in his hand? And what could he have seen there, that it should have slipped from his grasp? Some terrible sight must have met his gaze to cause such an accident to happen.

No! This Baroness! Who would have thought it?

That American is an enviable fellow; he has supplanted them all!

What interesting material was this for the scandal-loving multitude, whose imagination revels in piquant situations; for the gossips in Neckar Street; for the old women at the cafés!

But there were also more serious persons who reasoned thus: The Baron is a man of honour; he shelters his wife; he

takes the whole blame upon his own shoulders ; he will not let a blemish rest upon his name. A brave man—a real nobleman—true as steel.

But one day the wind suddenly veered round. The Baron, in a marvellous manner, began to recover, was able to take food ; his iron nature laughed to scorn the Doctor's predictions. The fever left him, the leaden hue of his countenance began to assume a slight tinge of colour, and his eyes brightened.

One day, as I was leaving him, he held me fast by the arm.

‘ Bagdanoff, a clergyman,’ he said faintly, with an attempt to raise himself.

It was the first word he had spoken

since that fearful night. I stood as if rooted to the spot. One thought shot like an arrow into my mind.

‘Will you not first speak to your wife?’ I asked earnestly, and looked imploringly at him.

He gazed sadly before him for a while, pressing his folded hands closely together. He seemed to be struggling with himself. I could tell that by the rising and falling of his breast, and by the changeful expression of his features. Suddenly his eyes became fixed, he unclasped his hands, and made an energetic movement.

‘No!’ he burst forth in a sharp, harsh tone.

It cut me to the heart, though I had almost feared such an answer.

Since the Baron had regained his consciousness his wife was obliged to keep carefully away from him ; the sight of her excited him. I had noticed several times when she entered how the sick man's eyes immediately fixed themselves upon her with a strange, reproachful expression ; how uneasy he became if she drew near him, or spoke to him. The unhappy lady at last no longer ventured into his room, though her heart and duty alike called her there. She could see for herself the influence her presence had upon the invalid.

At last she only came when he was asleep. She would then sit as still as a statue by his couch, like a Niobe, remaining there sometimes for hours in a painful stupor.

It was quite evident that her husband cherished a deep, unconquerable feeling of aversion against her, under which she suffered unutterably.

When I thought of the fatherly affection he had always shown to his lovely young wife, and how that he himself was so near the brink of the grave, I hoped that I might still be able to induce him to speak a word to her before he saw the clergyman. There must surely be many things to be explained between them; perhaps she might be able to lessen the burden on his soul. It would give him some comfort, some consolation, could he but know her to be less guilty.

The tears came into my eyes, my heart was full.

‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,’ I repeated slowly, and held his hand fast in mine.

He knit his dark brows and set his face in the terrible conflict ; his features seemed carved in stone. He lay for some minutes without moving, then his breast heaved, and violent bodily pain loosed the tension.

‘I *have* forgiven her,’ said he, with much difficulty, ‘but I will not see her, or speak to her ; there is too much between us. It is better so, Bagdanoff—fetch me a clergyman, a grave, prudent man.’

While he thus spoke he did not look at me, but gazed gloomily before him into vacancy. His cough came on, causing

him great pain; speaking had evidently much exhausted him.

‘I will do your bidding, Herr von Maszmann,’ I said, in much anxiety, as I noticed how the suffering disfigured his features. ‘I will hasten at once, do not be uneasy.’

I was about to go, but he still held my hand firmly, and seemed to wish to say something else. But the words would not come—breath failed him. At last he whispered :

‘My honour—is to me—before everything.’

His voice was like the rustle of a leaf in the evening breeze, but it found an echo.

I turned round in terror.

There stood the Baroness. She had

heard the cough, and, in her anxiety, had entered the room without our perceiving her. Softly as his words had been spoken, they reached her ears. With hands clasped over her pale brow, she stood there. For a moment it seemed as if grief and shame would annihilate her. She trembled like a willow before the storm ; her frame quivered with anguish.

But it was only for a moment.

Before I could reach her side, or hinder her, she threw herself on her knees by her husband's bed.

‘Forgive—Rudolph—forgive me!’ she implored, in a tone of heart-rending sorrow.

‘I have been a coward, thoughtless, but, believe me, Rudolph, never dishonoured!’

She raised her eyes to his with a look

that would have softened a stone, but the Baron lay there, stern as flinty rock.

This lasted for a moment, then he turned his eyes slowly upon her, a gloomy smile of contempt was on his face. From his mouth issued one word, sharp, cutting as a sword.

‘Liar!’ he hissed, through his closed teeth.

The wife shrank under this word as if touched by a red-hot iron. Her tears ceased, she threw her head back proudly, as if her whole being revolted from this cruel affront. Her lips trembled, her pale countenance was crimsoned with a deep blush, then turned again to a ghastly white. She rose from her knees, and drew herself upright.

‘ You are mistaken, Rudolph,’ she said, in a peculiar deep tone of voice, fixing her eyes reproachfully and yet so sorrowfully upon the sick man. ‘ I am not a liar. I was only cowardly, faint-hearted. I have concealed something from you—I have been silent when I should have spoken. I am punished for it—fearfully, terribly punished !

‘ Know this then——

‘ That poor dying man in there is Constantine my first husband !’

The Baron started. For a moment the husband and wife gazed into each other’s eyes.

What a world of thought, what a flood of unspoken questions and answers

was contained in that short span of time !

Then the young wife gave a deep sigh, and, with a heavy fall, sank fainting to the ground.

The Baron fell back, while a flush suffused his countenance and a light gleamed in his eye.

‘ Good God ! ’ he exclaimed.

I called for help. The scales fell from my eyes ; my heart bounded with delight. Her first husband ! And I had not recognised him, had not once imagined it. But that handsome cavalier whom I remembered, and this woe-begone invalid—could they be the same person ?

Her first husband ! Now all was clear to me.

The mystery was solved !

There, Constantine von Gleichen—here,
the Baron von Maszmann !

Poor Mélanie—poor, poor wife !

CHAPTER III.

THE PRINCESS'S VISIT.

‘ And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.’



CHAPTER III.

THE PRINCESS'S VISIT.

THE Baroness was confined to her bed. The scenes of emotion, the night watchings, the anxiety and the shame, had been too much for her bodily powers ; she had sunk under them. The Doctor feared that a brain fever was impending. The heavily-taxed frame needed the greatest care.

The President of police had, as the reader has already learnt, stationed two

officers in the house on guard, and he now let them remain as a protection against intrusion. Only by special permission from himself could any one enter.

Again the ray of light had come to illumine the darkness, and again malevolent tongues had turned the good news into evil.

‘A pretty tale, indeed! So the false-faced one has two husbands!’ said malicious souls.

‘Well! One can never tell what is concealed under a fair appearance! It is said that she was not even divorced from her first husband!’

So the spiteful chattered.

But there were others who were overwhelmed with remorse, having learnt too

late how hasty they had been in passing judgment upon the unfortunate.

Prince Paul returned from his hunting-lodge to his palace in town, and often spoke in the court circle of the sad affair that had so closely touched his heart. He let fall some very bitter remarks about Herr von Bücking, while he expressed his deep sympathy with the unhappy lady.

Several Russian gentlemen pledged themselves for the fact that the Baroness had, in all due form, been divorced from her first husband.

After the Prince had sent his adjutant, and the Princess her physician, to inquire for the Baron and his wife, many people left their cards.

But the most energetic and pertinacious to enter the lists for their reviled countrywoman were the Princess Algarucki and the Frau von Baniutin.

They threw down the gauntlet to all comers. No expression derogatory to the Baroness might be uttered in their presence. Indeed, Frau von Baniutin did not hesitate to install herself in our little house as nurse to the Baroness.

Yes—the little villa was transformed into a hospital—people spoke in whispers, and walked about on tiptoe. It seemed as if the angel of death hovered over it.

The pseudo Mr. Williams—the first husband of the Baroness, Constantine von Gleichen—lay in the same unconscious

state. The Baron was certainly a little better since he had known his wife to be less guilty than he had imagined ; yet he still hovered on the brink of the grave ; the slightest breath might extinguish the flickering flame of life.

The Baroness lay in the fearful delirium of fever, now frenzied to madness, now prostrate with utter exhaustion.

The Princess came daily several times to inquire after the invalids, to bring them some costly delicacy, and to ease her heart by a chat with me. Her visits were a great comfort to me.

I had an old, low easy-chair in my not very luxurious apartment. In this she would place herself, when she came to see us, as near as possible to the stove. Olga

Petrowna was always very chilly. 'I am a little cold, Nicolas,' she would say; 'it is a result of my way of living.' Indeed, lying in bed until five o'clock was enough to bring any one into bad habits.

When I had settled her comfortably in her chair, with a footstool for her feet, and wrapped her in her sable cloak, made after the Russian style, as light as a feather and as warm as a down bed, she would sit for some time with half-closed eyes, while I, seated opposite to her, waited impatiently till she should speak.

'You see, Nicolas, that I was right,' she began at length. 'You were not then fully convinced, my friend, you were silent — silence is unanswerable. One should not be over-hasty in passing

judgment . . . I am no saint . . . I——’ shaking her head, she said in a low voice : ‘God pardon me ! You cannot tell, Nicolas, how I have been situated in my life . . . let us not talk of the past. Ah ! how sad was the old style of education ! You know, Nicolas. Governesses who robbed ! Tutors who drank, or did worse ! My father was a grand seigneur, and had no time to trouble himself about me . . . my mother was dead. . . . Afterwards my husband . . . well ! never mind about him.’

The old lady here secretly pressed the cross which she wore under her mantle, according to the Russian custom ; she lay back again with closed eyes, as if to shut out those sad pictures of the past.

‘But believe me, Nicolas,’ she continued energetically, ‘you men are wrong when you do not trust in woman’s honour—you do yourselves harm—you rob yourselves of faith.

‘And what are you, then, that you should judge us? Mere tyrants!

‘But I must not excite myself.

‘Listen, Nicolas; there are women who are endowed with principle, with purity of heart, who would rather suffer the most frightful torments than deviate from a path of rectitude. They are to be found everywhere in our country, and especially here in Germany, where education and religious feeling, perhaps also the coldness of their nature, comes to their aid. These are one class. But there are others. Those who

are absorbed by a great passion, noble souls, fever-tossed, storm-tried, who live and breathe for love alone, and rush headlong into ruin.

‘From pure souls, temptations rebound impotently, as the blunted arrow from the bright shield. Such a soul, passionate yet pure, is the Baroness. I saw it in her, she had that fated look. From the first day I received her into my heart . . . a suffering sister. . . .

‘It is a fearful position,’ she continued, mysteriously, after a pause. ‘Poor Mélanie! How I pity her . . . two husbands . . . one whom she loves, and the other . . . the Baron. . . .

‘And perhaps to-morrow . . .’

She was suddenly silent.

There was silence for some time in the room.

‘You have never heard, Nicolas, why she was separated from her first husband?’ asked the Princess.

‘Never,’ I replied.

‘The people here relate various tales—the wicked wretches!’ She shook her hand so energetically that the rings sparkled and rattled on her slender fingers.

‘If I had anything to do with their future, I would give them a spoonful of pitch and sulphur for every one of their wicked lies.’

I could not help smiling at her eagerness.

There were again some moments of

silence, till a new idea struck her, and, raising herself from her half-recumbent position, she suddenly began :

‘ Nicolas, you must do me a favour.’

I made a slight inclination, and looked at her expectantly.

‘ I should like to see *him* once—the first one—you understand. I do not wish him or the others to see me. You can easily manage it ?’

‘ Nothing is more simple, your Highness. I will just go across and see if he is asleep, and the coast clear.’

I went to the other room. Herr von Gleichen lay in the same unconscious condition, with closed eyes. I hastened back to the Princess ; I gave her my arm, and led her across the passage to the sick-

room. At the door she stood still, with head bent forward, and looked in.

I stepped to the window and drew the curtains back a little, so that the light fell full upon the countenance of the sick man ; then, letting it fall, I returned to the door on tiptoe.

‘A worn face—a martyr’s head,’ said the Princess, with much emotion. ‘Good heavens!—and therefore all this trouble,’ she continued briskly, turning her large eyes expressively upon me. ‘Oh, this wicked world !

‘Thank you, Nicolas ; I beg you now to call Tatiana to lead me downstairs—you must not trouble yourself.

‘*À propos*, have you good news of Hélène ?’

‘Thank you, she is quite well.’

‘Give her my love, the darling, and also to your mother.’

Tatiana stood ready, and gave her arm to the Princess.

‘*Au revoir, mon ami,*’ she called back, as she was descending——‘Oh, this wicked world!’

Another day she came and brought Nina with her. The child could no longer be restrained, she longed after her mother. She believed that she was dead, and that they concealed it from her. She was determined to see her mother; they might say what they liked, she would see her. The Princess had at last yielded, as soon as Nina promised to be reasonable.

It was a touching sight.

The little creature stood at the door of the sick-room, with the tears rolling down her cheeks, and her little mouth murmured softly :

‘ Mamma, dear mamma.’

We let her alone. She entered on tiptoe, and drew nearer and nearer to the bed, until she could reach her mother’s hand ; she eagerly grasped it, bent her face over it, and moistened it with tears and kisses.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BARON'S STORY.

‘ She never told her love,
But let concealment, like a worm i’ the bud,
Feed on her damask cheek.’



CHAPTER IV.

THE BARON'S STORY.

THE Baroness recovered. It was as if some inward feeling came to nature's assistance. Perhaps it was the longing to behold once more that pale countenance, to be able once more to minister to his wants.

When she came to herself, he was her first thought, her first care ; she forgot her husband, and even her child.

How passionately she must love him !

How strange that she had ever been willing to be separated from him!

Her first husband!—And Nina was his child—he was her father.

Years ago husband and wife had been divided, and now had found each other again. Was it chance? No—Heaven had brought them together again. She met him again, a shadow of his former self, and seemed only to have recovered him in order to lose him—to lose both him and the other—cruel, inexplicable fate!

Inexhaustible but sorrowful material was thus provided for the long daily conversations between the Princess and myself. We exhausted ourselves in conjectures, we lost ourselves in suppositions, and always came at last, like thousands of

others, to the one conclusion ; that the ways of God are mysterious and incomprehensible.

‘ All discord, harmony not understood ;
All partial evil, universal good.’

However dark may be the path by which a Higher Hand leads us, still, all that happens to us is for our good ; all suffering leads to God.

Where human understanding ceases, we must bow in humility before His Almighty Power, seeking only to do His will.

I have already mentioned, that since the discovery, since he had known that the stranger was his wife's first husband, an alteration had taken place in the Baron. That gloomy, threatening look had passed

from his brow ; his features had now lost their rigid expression ; melancholy sadness only was stamped upon his countenance. He had never been very communicative, he was rather taciturn, and now he had become more so ; nevertheless, it seemed to me, when I occasionally sat by his couch and read to him, or occupied myself in little offices for his comfort, as if he wished to say something, as if he felt impelled to unburden his heart to me. Words often hovered on his lips, but he repressed them again and again.

Since his wife had left her room, she frequently came to see him, but he said little to her. He held her hand in his, gazing at her, and murmuring now and then : ‘ Poor Mélanie—poor wife !’

One morning, when I came to his room, he raised himself, and asked me what day it was.

I told him it was Sunday. The bells were ringing for church.

He listened to them for some time in silence, and then said with an effort: 'Draw back the curtains.'

I did as he requested--the cold rays of the winter sun poured into the room. He folded his hands, shut his eyes, and lay there for a long time as if dead.

'I have had a dream, dear friend,' he said at last, raising himself. 'I dreamt I was in heaven. I cannot tell you my dream, it is too long, and speech is so painful to me; there is something here,' laying his hand with a pitiful movement

upon his chest, 'that cuts me like a knife.

'I must see the child, Bagdanoff,' he continued, after a pause, in a gentle voice; 'ask my wife to send Nina to me.'

He laid his head back again with a deep sigh, and closed his eyes; the exertion had been too much for his wounded lung.

I went across to Frau von Baniutin, and communicated to her the Baron's wish, of which she informed the Baroness.

Nina went to his room, and soon after he sent for the Doctor and myself. The child sat upon the bed, her little rosy fingers playing with his large hands; she was chattering gaily.

'Papa, you must get quite well now, and

have me with you again ; I love you and mamma so very much.'

When we entered, she ceased her prattle. The Baron beckoned us to approach, and made an attempt to raise himself.

'Go away now, darling, to your mamma, he said, following the child with his eyes as she left the room.

Then he turned to us. 'I have a favour to ask of you, gentlemen,' he said. 'Before I die, I wish to make my will, and you to witness it. Give me writing materials.'

I handed him what he wanted, and for some time nothing was heard but the scratching of the pen as it moved to and fro across the paper.

He then looked over what he had written, altering a word here and there, and handed the paper to me.

‘Read it, Bagdanoff!’

I read :

‘This is my last will and testament. The one dated March 7th, 18—, which is deposited at Riga, I hereby revoke. I depose :

‘1. That the children of my deceased sister receive Zameziesko, together with the manors attached, and twenty thousand roubles each, in cash, from my personal effects.

‘2. I bequeath to my cousin George von Prebenthof ten thousand silver roubles, in token of my esteem for him.

‘3. I appoint as my sole heiress, my step-daughter Nina, Baroness von Gleichen, daughter of my beloved wife Mélanie, born of her first marriage with the Baron Constantine von Gleichen. All my landed property, and the remainder of my personal estate, she will receive without any limitation whatever.

‘Should my sister’s children dispute this disposal of my property, they will forfeit their share of the same.

‘As long as my step-daughter remains a minor, or until she marries, my beloved wife will receive the revenues of my possessions, without being obliged to render any account thereof to any one.

‘This I have written with my own hand, in full possession of my faculties, in

the presence of two witnesses, whose names are hereunto attached.'

While I was slowly reading this document the Baron still lay there with folded hands, gazing up towards heaven. The sun illumined his countenance, surrounding it almost with a halo.

The sight quite melted my heart.

'Thank you, gentlemen,' he said languidly, as we affixed our names to the document.

On the evening of the next day I was sitting again by his bed. I had just bandaged his wound, and given him his food, for he was as helpless as a child now. I had set the lamp on one side, that the light might not fall upon his face, and he

lay quite still, while I tried to divert his thoughts by a little conversation.

Suddenly he interrupted me.

‘Nicolas,’ he said, ‘I wish to tell you something,’ with a voice full of emotion. ‘You are a true man,’ he continued, ‘I must pour out my heart to you before I die, you friend in need.’

‘Oh, do not say that,’ I implored.

‘Since that time, since that dream, I have known for certain that I should die. I shall go away from here—it is best so I shall make room,’ he said, with a deep sigh.

Deep melancholy lay upon my soul as he spoke thus.

His voice was faint and trembling, as,

frequently interrupting himself, and striving for breath, he continued :

‘ You know, Bagdanoff I was her father’s friend even a little older than he. We were schoolfellows—neighbours. At that time Mélanie was still a child about as big as the little Nina. Her mother died early a beautiful woman—a Pole. You know not bad-hearted, but swayed by impulse knowing little of domestic love or principle a true child of the world. Soon after her father died his grief at the loss of his wife was so excessive that he could not overcome it. He caught cold out hunting in a week he was gone.

‘ It was a great misfortune ! The child,

Mélanie, came to her relations, Poles. She had property on her mother's side, and the Brinskis immediately seized upon the guardianship. Her father had arranged nothing as to her future—she lived near Kowno.

‘I did not see her again for some years in the meanwhile she had married—had been separated from her husband—and, with her child, was again living with her relations.

‘There again I saw her. I received a letter, Nicolas a letter in an unknown hand it was from her the daughter of my old friend. She wanted my advice, begged for assistance how could I refuse it?

‘It was a sad story, Nicolas ; much

mischief had been done. Her relations had tried with all their might to hinder her marriage with Herr von Gleichen only with the greatest energy had she been able to accomplish it. Now, since her divorce, they had tried to force her into a marriage with one of their own family—a ruined man.

‘When this failed they seized her property the property of her child, defrauded her robbed her. Intriguing and scheming spread their nets round her.

‘Poor child! She had found them out too late her innocent mind could not understand it but now her eyes were opened. They were perpetually urging her to give money . . .

to sign mortgages, worthless as the paper on which they were written.

‘Then in her trouble she remembered me . . . she called me . . . and I came.’

‘Poor lady!’ I exclaimed, with much feeling.

‘It was scarce conceivable, Bagdanoff. Her relations robbed this poor, helpless, deeply-afflicted woman right and left. This had gone on for several years . . . till her large property was quite gone—scattered to the four winds of heaven . . . herself—her child—beggars.

‘I thought it over anxiously. I begged her, first of all, to withdraw herself from their influence . . . to change her place of abode . . . to show a firm will. She

did so and moved to Mitau, entrusting to me the management of her affairs.

‘I did what I could to the best of my power. But, you know Bagdanoff you know well our sad position at home Alas! alas! corruption everywhere difficulties at every step. The relations condescended to means, fought with weapons, that an honourable man would despise.’

I nodded assent.

‘I also know something of that,’ I murmured involuntarily, and thought of many things that had come under my notice in my official position, scarcely conceivable. In Russia a man must have a handful of gold to obtain his rights. //

prend is stamped upon every official face.

The Baron took a draught of lemonade, and continued :

‘ I undertook the trusteeship, but Kiseneff, who was at the head of affairs at that time, was heart and soul with the relations, the grasping Brinskis. Instead of helping me he put things into worse confusion the villain and because I would not understand his intimations to give him money, he caused endless difficulty.

‘ He tried to set up the first guardian, a cousin of Mélanie’s, a thorough scoundrel ; and when I went to law with him, he made false reports and brought false witnesses—it was like running one’s

head against a stone wall—a dirty business.’

The Baron breathed painfully, and closed his eyes for a moment.

‘I saw it all . . . the whole infamy . . . I was obliged to make it plain to Mélanie . . . it was a duty I owed to her and her child . . . I had loved her father, and for his sake I had been ready to help her.

‘But now, when I began to know her, I did it for her own sake—for herself alone. She was a true woman, a noble soul, Nicolas—spotless as virgin snow—a great sorrow lay upon her heart—anxieties and troubles surrounded her. To lighten her burden, and to assure her future and that of her child, there is in our land but one

way . . . you know it, Nicolas . . . marriage.

‘I proposed it to her . . . the very idea filled her with horror.

‘But the family troubles increased. Her relations lost all sense of decency—they seized her estates, appropriated the revenues, and would not give her a farthing to support herself and her child.

‘I hastened to the governor, applied to the courts . . . demanded justice for her . . . and punishment for the evil-doers. All was in vain.

‘And now for the first time, a means of protection and happiness for her occurred to me.’

He sighed very deeply.

‘Heaven is my witness—how pure and

true was my design! I reasoned with myself thus: Her heart is still filled with one image . . . he whom she loves is lost to her . . . as if he were dead . . . she will not marry again . . . and yet it is the only way to help her. Only her husband, according to our laws, can render her effectual assistance . . . can save her property for herself and her child.

‘Like an inspiration the idea came upon me . . . why should not I, her father’s friend . . . an old man . . . offer her my hand? Without the pretensions of a husband . . . to be her guardian . . . her adviser . . . her friend? It was the only way . . . I pointed it out to her . . . and at last she consented.

‘I became her husband . . . she came

to me with her child, Nina. I sheltered them . . . they beautified the evening of my life . . . she and the little one.'

The invalid again sighed deeply.

'Ah, Nicolas! I have kept back something. During the whole five years of our married life, I was only her fatherly friend . . . nothing more. I imagined then—that my heart was too old—like a fountain that is dried up with years. I thought . . . at my age, I was dead to all that . . . there seemed to be no risk . . . greybeard that I was.

'But I was mistaken, Bagdanoff, grievously mistaken.

'This wife of mine, Mélanie! . . . laugh if you will . . . I loved her to folly! . . . I would have given my life for her . .

would have shed the last drop of my blood for one look of love from her! Yes—laugh if you will, Bagdanoff!

‘I was no silly coxcomb . . . a grave, serious man . . . I should never have thought it possible . . . but it came . . . slowly . . . by degrees.

‘The fabric of my reason fell like a pack of cards . . . I idolised her . . . loved her with a consuming passion . . . and was silent!

‘She imagined nothing of all this . . . No . . . I was calm outwardly. I dared not terrify her, Nicolas! . . . and I succeeded. She knew nothing of the tumult that raged in my breast . . . no man knows it . . . you are the first . . . and the only one.

‘Five long years! . . . Ah, my friend!

‘It did not come all at once . . . very gradually . . . I was an old man, a bachelor, unused to women. It was a sacrifice to me, as well as to herself . . . my habits . . . peculiarities . . . you understand.

‘But soon . . . when my eyes followed her . . . in the house, in the park . . . everywhere . . . that glorious countenance . . . that lovely form . . . that sweet disposition . . . and with it all the heavy burden of sorrow on her heart!

‘When I came to see, how wise, how noble, how pure and modest she was . . . when I came to know her charm, the goodness of her heart . . . then, Nicolas, then it came home to me . . . that until

now I had lived in vain . . . that there was one treasure in this world for which I had forgotten to seek. I cursed my obstinate folly, which had kept me back from having wife and child while I was still in the vigour of my youth . . . and yet . . . at the same time . . . I blessed my fate, which had brought me such a treasure even at the close of my life.

‘But ah! The gold in my hand soon began to burn me . . . I suffered the torments of Tantalus . . . I had thought, as I said, that my heart was quite dead . . . that the spring of my affections was dried up . . . and now . . . I was starving with a full cup . . . I thirsted . . . I panted . . . daily . . . hourly . . . with ever-increasing torment! O God!’

He groaned painfully, and shut his eyes again. Much speaking, added to the excitement, caused me to fear the worst. Nevertheless, I could understand that it had become a deep, an inevitable necessity to this man to relieve his heart by speaking to some one. I therefore sat quite still, without moving.

He began again, almost in a whisper, with many interruptions from weakness.

‘I was attacked by a painful malady, rheumatism, and came here for relief. At home we lived alone . . . here we were drawn into the vortex of society. Mélanie became distinguished . . . celebrated . . . I saw how they all paid court to her . . . how they attempted to approach her . . . young men . . . of high position . . . in-

tellectual, handsome . . . all paid her homage. I felt no fear . . . no envy or jealousy . . . I knew Mélanie's heart . . . I would have sworn by her honour as by my own. Let them buzz around her if they liked . . . one look from her . . . and I was easy. No . . . that was not it.

‘ But one day . . . I noticed an alteration in herself. She was pale . . . absent . . . confused. The sight of me seemed to terrify her . . . she often burst into tears . . . I questioned her . . . she avoided me . . . I pressed her more urgently . . . in vain.

‘ At last I became anxious. What was it that she was concealing from me? It seemed as if demons had taken possession of her . . . even the child was neglected.

Then came those venomous tongues . . .
again and again . . . I would not listen
. . . Mélanie untrue! . . . Mélanie a
faithless wife! . . . It was inconceiv-
able!

‘I drove back the thought—but—but
. . . . I began to study her my
looks followed her I became a prey
to suspicion I suffered agonies . . .
my honour! Jealousy seized upon my
heart with its greedy talons and
then those rancorous tongues!

‘At last I was weak enough to follow
her secretly once, twice—
for a week together spies told me
when she was with him I was
obliged to believe it. . . . I listened to
the suggestions of that serpent. . . . I

went there I entered—the weapon in my hand.

‘Would to God I had been deceived !

‘But no there he lay, pale as death, with wide open eyes and she herself sat by his bedside reading to him. The light of the lamp shone upon them both. I saw it saw them shrink in terror.

‘Then I turned giddy a heavy weight seemed to press upon me the pistol fell from my hand a report a stinging pain I sank to the earth. I remember no more !’

‘Oh, horrible ! most horrible !’

His countenance had become flushed as his agitation and excitement increased ;

and now, when he had finished, he passed his hand hastily over his mouth. His lips were dyed with that blood-stained foam. He sighed painfully, and sank back as if lifeless.

At this moment his wife entered the room.

‘He sleeps,’ I said softly ; and as I gazed at her, I thought to myself : ‘Ah, if you could know all that I have heard!’ I took her hand and led her gently away. I feared he would awake and betray himself.

I took her across to Frau von Baniutin, and then returned to the Baron.

He lay quite still, as if in profound sleep.

‘God be praised!’ I said, with thankful heart, ‘that he has removed the burden

from his soul. The rest will do him good
—he sleeps.'

Ah ! I little knew that this sleep was the
sleep of death.

CHAPTER V.

THE BARON'S DEATH.

‘How calm his exit ;
Night-dews fall not more gently.’



CHAPTER V

THE BARON'S DEATH.

AFTER all, I received the intelligence of the Baron's death by letter, notwithstanding that I had nursed him the whole time, and had heard the last words from his lips, that agonising confession.

My mother and my two sisters had been at Pau since October. She was a great sufferer from an obstinate affection of the throat, and from weak nerves. I had been in constant anxiety about her during the

whole time. Just after the fearful tragedy which had shut me up in the villa in Garden Road, I received a letter from my eldest sister, Hértha, informing me that the doctor in Pau had ordered them to remove to Nice, as the climate of the Riviera did not suit my mother.

This intelligence caused me much anxiety. A change now, in the middle of winter, and a long journey, would quite exhaust my mother. And then I knew too well the cruel foresight of many physicians practising at watering-places. As soon as they think their patient's condition hopeless, they shake them off under any pretext, that they may go and die elsewhere.

I was just in the frame of mind to look

on the dark side of everything. This is not strange, considering all that had happened, and my present surroundings, which would give colour to my thoughts.

That evening, when I entered my room on leaving the Baroness, I found a letter lying on the table. I recognised Hertha's handwriting, and hastily seized it, with a foreboding of evil.

My anxiety almost overcame me as I tore it open and read. My presentiment had not deceived me. My mother was very ill, almost hopeless, and urgently desired to see me. I was overcome with grief.

My poor, good mother !

I could be spared now ; the Baron would miss me, but I was not indispensable.

My poor mother ! She was ill in that far-off country, she who loved me so much.

I ran to the Doctor ; I wrote a line to the President and the Princess. I hastily packed my things, threw my portmanteau into the carriage, caught the first train, and rushed on into the dark stormy winter's night.

I was alone in the *coupé*, wrapped up in my fur, with dark, gloomy thoughts in my soul, harmonising with the night of darkness and storm. Sorrow everywhere ! From whence I came, and whither I was going !

One single star alone gleamed through the darkness ; Hélène's lovely image arose and comforted me. Oh that the futur

might bring happiness, that a clear morning might break after this gloomy night !

At last I sought relief from these thoughts in sleep. I passed through Strasbourg without knowing it, so sound was my slumber after so many night-watches. The first pale streak of grey appeared in the horizon as we approached Mulhausen, where I took rail to Lyons, *viâ* Belfort.

The Jura had assumed its winter mantle of deep snow, looking dazzlingly white in the frosty air ; but when we had left it behind and were nearing the Rhone, the influence of the southern climate was quickly manifest.

Without stopping, I hurried on through Lyons and Marseilles to Nice ; anxiety

was the whip which urged me onward.

Four days after my arrival at Nice—during which time, thank God, my mother had passed a crisis for the better—I was horrified to see in a newspaper the announcement of the Baron's death. I was sitting in the reading-room of the hotel when the recent journals were brought in. I took one from North Germany and read it. When I had finished I was about to lay it down, when, amongst the advertisements, I caught sight of a name which immediately riveted my attention; it was *Mélanie, Baroness von Maszmann*. With a choking sensation I read the following:

‘After much suffering, my dear husband died this evening, gently and painlessly.

‘MÉLANIE,

‘BARONESS VON MASZMANN.’

I looked at the date. The Baron had died the very evening I left. The exertion of his confession to me had, perhaps, been the cause of his death.

Deeply shocked, I left the room. A thousand melancholy thoughts crowded into my mind. I wished to be alone.

A day or two after, the usual formal announcement arrived from W——, and a little later a letter from my good friend Princess Algarucki. Only the postscript was written in her own hand; it was

original, and I therefore transcribe it here :

‘ His sufferings are over. He has run his course . . . it is now well with him. He was eight-and-sixty and a half year over—a good age.’

En parenthèse, the Princess was almost as old, but she felt herself still quite young, in fact immortal.

‘ He is dead, and it is good so—you know that, Nicolas? One of my governesses (she was a nasty woman with a particular affection for drink) used frequently to tell me a story about Alexander the Great — how with a sword he cut

asunder the Gordian Knot. *Eh bien!* that pistol-shot has loosened a knot here. Dear Mélanie! She is all at once freed from her embarrassment, for it is certain she is infatuated about the other one. I pity her very much . . . she takes it very much to heart about the poor Baron, her husband. She is very miserable, Nicolas; but only think—the “other one” is recovering. What will happen now? God only knows!

‘Always your true

‘OLGA PETROWNA.

‘P.S.—Send me an answer quickly, and tell me about your mother. I miss you very much.’

From the letter itself I learnt the follow-

ing: Frau von Baniutin had gone into the room about half an hour after I left, and found the Baron in a quiet slumber. She returned to the Baroness, and said to her:

‘God be praised, he is sleeping like a child.’

When she entered the room again (I was then well on my journey) to take away the lamp and kindle the night-light, the Baron lay as still as before, in the same position.

Not wishing to wake him, she stepped towards the bed to see that everything was in order. She perceived with horror that his countenance had quite altered—the features were rigid, the nose sharp. She bent down and listened, there was no

sound of breathing. She touched his hands, they were already cold.

The Baron was dead.

He had died of internal hemorrhage.

CHAPTER VI.

RE-UNITED.

‘Marriage, rightly understood,
Gives to the tender and the good
A little heaven below.’



CHAPTER VI.

RE-UNITED.

Two years passed away.

Towards the end of September 18—, I was travelling in Italy with my bride. I was taking Hélène to the south for our bridal trip, and to introduce her to my mother, who was passing the winter at Florence.

I had been married two months, and was now enjoying the happiness of love fulfilled——Hélène was an angel of beauty and goodness.

It was a glorious autumn, the air was pure and balmy, the heat not overpowering; refreshing showers during the last few weeks had revived the vegetation, which had been parched by the summer sun, and it was now bursting forth with renewed vigour. The freshness and verdure was like spring.

One afternoon we were going to Certosa.

My sisters were to have accompanied us, but at the last moment, when the carriage was at the door, they were detained by some friends.

I must confess I was not very much vexed at this; I liked best being with my wife alone—we were still in our honeymoon.

We drove out through the Porta Romana in an open carriage, and soon left the noisy

town behind us. In front rose the gently-sloping heights, leading upwards to the Apennines. Clothed with wood, dotted with country houses, they towered one above the other as far as the eye could reach.

We drove through the suburbs, between rows of decayed-looking houses, ornamented like palaces on the exterior, but bare and inhospitable within. Long lines of dusty carriages stood before them, harnessed with horses, mules and asses, mixed together. Before the gates, in the shadow of the houses, sat half-naked children with dark hair and large eyes, and near them chatted groups of girls, in gay light dresses, engaged in plaiting straw.

Slowly we crawled up the steep road, while the vetturino on his box flicked the flies with his whip and chewed the stalk of a rose. We reached the top of the hill, and our horses trotted gaily on upon the level ground. Our road lay between thick hedges of vines and mulberry trees; over their green walls, on the right, towered the church of St. Gaggio. Before us lay the mountains, which seemed to rise higher and higher in lines of wonderful beauty, from the richest green to the softest hues of grey and violet.

We rolled on through the village of Galluzzo. Crowds of beggars accosted us, all more or less afflicted.

‘ *Un soldo, signor—un soldo, bellissima signora!* ’ they cried, coming up close to

the carriage, and following pertinaciously till we gave them their tribute.

Behind Galluzzo we passed over the Ema, and at the junction of this river with the Greve, another rapid mountain stream, on a little hill covered with olives and cypresses, rose before us, like a mediæval fortress, the monastery, the Certosa di Val d'Ema.

We stopped before a grated iron door, surrounded by the usual crowd of beggars, till a porter came and opened to us; then we went on up the steep narrow path, between mulberry plantations, till we arrived in the cool outer court of the monastery, where we left our carriage.

One of the monks, clad in a long white robe, came and offered himself as our

guide; he had a grave and kindly face, not showing much intellectual power—a Sicilian by birth, as he informed us.

Conducted by him we ascended to the gallery, bordered on one side by arched windows, which afforded a good view of the magnificent landscape. The valley of the Arno, Florence, and the range of the Apennines as far as Pistoja lay before us.

At this monastery they made world-renowned essences, especially the extract of violets, and liqueurs. Hélène made her purchases, and sipped a little glass of the oily, gold-coloured fluid; and when she had finished we continued our way through long, cold passages, across to the cathedral.

Almost dazzled by the splendour of the interior of this magnificent building, we were glad to step out into the court, a wide, empty space surrounded by a piazza. In the middle was a well, with an ancient copper bucket, and close by stood a fan palm—a solitary child of the south.

In a corner were two small iron crosses. The monk told us that these marked the burying-place of the two last departed brothers of the monastery. No stone, no inscription told who they were.

‘Ashes to ashes—dust to dust!’

‘We are only twenty-three here now,’ said the monk, ‘and most of us quite aged.’

An expression of anxious thought came

over the countenance of my sweet young wife. I took her by the arm and led her gently away.

In one of the passages we saw something white glimmer between the pillars ; another monk was coming slowly towards us, followed by a lady and gentleman.

‘ See ! strangers like ourselves,’ I said to Hélène.

She looked at them with indifference ; then suddenly her expression changed to one of astonishment and delight.

‘ Oh, look, look, Nicolas !’ she cried quickly.

‘ Well, what is the matter ?’

‘ It is Mélanie—Frau von Maszmann—what a happy chance !’

She left me, and ran forwards towards

the new-comers in her lively, warm-hearted manner.

My heart beat with emotion—Mélanie here !

I followed in much agitation.

I saw a tall, somewhat haggard man, with a long black beard, conducting a lady. She was rather pale, but stately and very beautiful. She looked up.

Yes—it was indeed Mélanie.

By this time she had recognised us, and hastened towards us smiling, with a flush of surprise on her cheeks.

‘Hélène Bagdanoff!’ she cried, ‘and you, my true friend—do I see you again? What happiness!’

‘Gracious lady,’ I stammered, kissing her hand.

We were both much agitated. She had tears in her eyes as she turned to her husband.

‘This is Nicolas, Constantine, Herr Councillor Bagdanoff, to whom we both owe so large a debt of gratitude.

She then threw her arms round Hélène and kissed her affectionately on both cheeks. I stood opposite to the stranger, Herr von Gleichen ; we gazed steadfastly at each other. When I saw him last, on that evening when the hasty summons called me away from the villa in Garden Road, he was pale and wan, in the grasp of death, one who had apparently done with life.

To-day, after nearly two years, I met him once more. The seemingly dead had

risen again, had been restored to life ; a handsome, stately man, with grave but kindly features.

I could trace in those noble features some resemblance to the pseudo Mr. Williams, whom I had seen pining with mortal sickness ; but I could scarcely realise that he and this noble gentleman, who now with heartfelt cordiality grasped both my hands in his, were one and the same person.

The thick beard, indeed, was a little mixed with grey, and the hair on the temples had begun to recede, but no one would have taken him to be at the most more than five-and-thirty, his eyes looked even younger.

The greetings on both sides were very

hearty. Then we walked in three couples up and down the cool cloistered passages, the two white-robed monks, Mélanie with Hélène, Herr von Gleichen and myself, in eager conversation.

How much there was to tell !

Those two, whom fate had so strangely brought together at that time in W——, who had passed such hours of agony there, were once more united ; they had at last, after heavy trials, found that happiness which the spring of their lives had not given them. They had now learnt this : To live to be happy.

In truth, my old friend the Princess had said rightly, ‘ That pistol-shot has cut the Gordian knot !’

And the Baron ! How truly had he

felt in his last hours—he must make room—he was one too many in the world !

Melancholy, overpowering thought !

With what wonderful power does a Higher Hand guide the fate of mankind.

At sunset we returned home in the same carriage. I sat opposite Frau von Gleichen. She was more beautiful, more charming than ever. But still there lay a shade of melancholy upon her lovely features, like a cloud upon the bright landscape. As the stern grandeur of the storm-cloud is illumined by the beauty of the sunshine, so shone upon her brow the sunny gleam of happiness, so spoke from her eyes the blessedness of perfect love.

Those whom man had divided, God had re-united.

I will tell you, kind reader, later on, how it all happened.

In our drive home I touched very cautiously upon the dark past, but we spoke much of the Princess ; and to my great joy I learnt from Mélanie that she was expected in Florence during the next week. So, in a short time, I should again see my old friend.

She had written to me several times during these months of absence, and her last letter was dated from Franzensbad, where she was spending the summer with her sister. She had not then decided where to go for the winter. Unwearied wanderer !

I had learnt from her, in the preceding year, that Mélanie was with her first hus-

band again, and that they had visited her on their way through Berlin. She also informed me that they intended to reside on one of their estates in the neighbourhood of the Prussian capital.

‘So they are again together,’ she had concluded. ‘I am glad for their own sakes, and especially on Nina’s account, for it was miserable for the child. She was quite old enough to suffer under her mother’s trouble. Well, they will now both of them keep the peace, for “burnt children dread the fire!”’

I thought of the good, excellent Baron, who now slumbered in his grave, whose pain was now stilled for ever. I was the

only one who knew his secret. Half unconsciously this passed through my mind as we approached the town, and even the joy of this reunion seemed touched with sadness.

But the wheels of our carriage were already rolling over the pavement; we were already driving down the long and narrow Via dei Serragli.

There lay the river, sparkling in the brilliancy of many lamps; upon the Lungarno thronged the multitude, enjoying the freshness of the evening breeze and the coolness of the water-side; crowds of people on foot and in carriages were in the busy streets.

We stopped before the Hôtel de Ville. At a window above appeared a dark curly

head. It was Nina, my darling. She uttered a cry of joy, then shot like an arrow down the steps and sprang into my arms.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS AT FLORENCE.

‘ Among them, sweet friendship, we hail thee
the best ;

Thou shedd’st a glad halo of bliss round
thy name ;

’Mid sad scenes of sorrow, and grief, and unrest,
’Tis sunshine, illumined by thy holy name.’



CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCESS AT FLORENCE.

AFTER this we saw each other daily. We were two couples in our honeymoon, and if I and Hélène acknowledged this with a certain *naïveté*, following the suggestions of our hearts, the others enjoyed it as a newly-regained gift from Heaven. They loved each other unspeakably, these two re-united ones, with a restrained glow and depth of affection which comes to but few mortals. They were two ardent spirits,

noble souls, strangely endowed beings, and I hardly wondered that at one time, when experience of life was wanting, they should have made themselves just as unhappy as they were now blessed.

One evening we drove to the Via Colli, on the other side of the Arno, the most lovely of all drives, unparalleled in beauty. The valley of the Arno lay extended before us in the golden twilight of the fast darkening evening like a fairy tale—like a dream. I was quite absorbed in admiration of the scene.

Suddenly an open carriage crossed our way, and for a moment obscured my view. It was going, like ourselves, at a slow pace.

Hélène uttered a slight exclamation,

which was immediately re-echoed from the other carriage.

Two ladies sat in it—the Princess and her cousin, the lovely Countess d'Alois Micly.

I had scarcely time to stop the carriage when the Princess, hastily rising from her half-reclining position, cried out with joy :

‘Nicolas Seminitich Bagdanoff! Dear Mélanie!’

I sprang down and hastened towards her. The rays of the setting sun dazzled my eyes and somewhat obscured my vision. I murmured :

‘Gracious Princess! — What a great happiness!—How well you look!—ever young and ever handsome!’ I pressed my lips upon her perfumed glove.

‘Flatterer . . . I am also very glad to see you again,’ she said, and touched me on both cheeks.

She was an enchantress, this woman. During the two years that I had not seen her, she had become at least ten years younger, and did not look a day older than forty.

‘I want to talk to you, Nicolas,’ she whispered in my ear. ‘I am staying with my cousin, the Countess d’Alois, Via Jacopo da Diaceta; come and see me alone to-morrow after mid-day.

‘Dear Olga,’ turning to her cousin, ‘let me introduce Herr Councillor Bagdanoff, a very dear friend of mine, of whom I have already spoken to you. Nicolas — my cousin, Olga Nikolajewna.’

By-the-bye, she was really her niece !

After kindly greetings, at last we all drove home together to take tea with the Countess.

Punctually at noon on the following day I ascended the steps of the Princess's house, to pay my promised visit.

I was conducted to a comfortable boudoir, elegantly tapestried with crimson silk.

I found the Princess almost buried in a large fauteuil, wrapped in a Persian dressing-gown, while her small, beautiful feet peeped forth from the covering and rested upon a footstool. She was sitting, as usual, close to the stove, although now there was no fire in it.

‘Ah, Nicolas,’ she said, stretching out her hand to me to kiss, and giving me a

kind look from her eyes, 'I have not for a long time been so glad at anything as to have a regular good chat with you undisturbed. Sit down here by me—I can make myself quite at home in my cousin's house; she is very kind-hearted, and is a great beauty.'

As she spoke, my eye involuntarily glanced at a costly marble bust, which stood half in shadow, in a recess.

'Yes—just look at that; she *is* a beauty, Nicolas, and all the world is at her feet,' said the Princess, smiling; 'that statue caused great excitement in the Paris Exhibition.'

'Exquisite,' I murmured, in rapture.

'My cousin cannot even go across the street without being admired. These

Italians are a *galante* people—they have taste. “*Madre de Dios!—la bellissima signora!*” are the exclamations that greet her when she shows herself. Well—she does not much mind it.

‘You look well, my friend—marriage suits you wonderfully, and your wife is a lovely creature. You have made a good choice, like a sensible man.

‘And Mélanie!

‘But sit down, I want to talk to you about her.’

I drew a chair near her and sat down.

‘I am as much interested as ever in that charming woman, Nicolas—I love her like my own daughter. I hope that she has at last reached her haven—is now happy. What do you think? Speak freely.’

‘I do not *think* that she is happy—I am *certain* that her happiness is assured,’ I answered warmly.

‘I rejoice to hear you say so. Her husband!—I scarcely saw him yesterday, and I have his image always before me, with that wan countenance, that tangled hair.

‘Well, listen:—when the other, the good Baron, was dead, this one appeared suddenly to revive. In a few weeks he had made such rapid steps towards recovery, that I felt obliged to speak to Mélanie on account of people’s talk—you understand.

‘She was quite intractable, determined not to leave him; and so I, old woman as I am, packed up my bundle, and, tearing myself reluctantly from my customary

mode of life, took up my abode in the little house in Garden Road.

‘For the sake of appearances, you know, Nicolas.’

I nodded, smiling, and she continued :

‘Well—after a slight relapse, the poor fellow improved daily ; and however much Mélanie might grieve over the Baron, and the tragedy that had taken place, still, nature will be nature. As *he* came back to life, bloom was restored to *her*.

‘She would not leave him even for a day, and so I advised them to take a journey, as soon as he could bear removal. They travelled to Nice, and were there married very quietly. It was the only thing to be done, for separation would have broken both their hearts.

‘Her husband is a handsome, stately man. I admire him much—an evident gentleman, a true nobleman, a man of honour—worthy even of her.

‘It still remains to me an inexplicable mystery, Nicolas, how these two, made for each other, were ever separated,’ continued the Princess, after a pause, looking thoughtfully at me.

‘It must have been something very special, like a thunderbolt, that cleaves the rocks asunder. It is quite incredible, after all that one has seen.’

‘Nothing extraordinary, I believe, Olga Petrowna,’ I answered gravely. ‘It was excess of love.’

The Princess sat upright, and gazed at me incredulously.

‘What do you mean? What do you know about it? Tell me, Nicolas.’

‘Excess of love,’ I answered with emphasis. ‘But I will relate the story to your Highness. I have learnt it all since that dreadful time, partly from others during my residence in Courland, and partly from these two themselves during these last weeks of our re-union.’

‘The solution of the mystery—I know it.’

The Princess leant slowly back again, her eyes fixed upon me in rapt attention.

‘Listen,’ I began.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVE-MATCH.

‘He meets, by heavenly chance express,
The destined maid.’



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOVE-MATCH.

‘HERR VON MENGHDEN, the father of the Baroness, was one of the most perfect gentlemen of his time.

‘You must certainly have heard of him, Princess; he often came to St. Petersburg, but of course it was before my time.’

Olga Petrowna nodded her head somewhat irritably.

‘I knew him years ago, Nicolas; he was

a tall, handsome man—rather a libertine, as they said.’

‘Manly beauty, it seems, is hereditary in the Menghden family, but Mélanie’s father added to this the most polished and courteous address. He was very thoughtless, very imprudent, spending his capital, instead of living only upon the interest. Besides, he was a great admirer of the fair sex.’

The Princess threw her head back, and extended slightly her delicate nostrils. She had a strange expression in her eyes, gazing straight before her, as if she were absorbed in remembrances of the past.

‘When he was thirty years old, Herr von Menghden was at Kowno, where he met, at a ball, Fräulein von Brinski. He

had never seen her before, but to look on her and lose his heart was the work of a moment.

‘A Menghden seldom woos in vain, and they were married, in spite of all the hindrances the family threw in the way. The Brinskis were a crafty race: they had managed with great skill to steer their bark safely through the storms and revolutions of unhappy Poland. They gave ample assistance to patriots, revolutionists, but they did this in secret, without being discovered, and had thus remained untouched, while other families were utterly ruined, and sent to Siberia.

‘The young Frau von Menghden was the heiress; the bulk of the family property was in her possession, and all this wealth

would be lost to them on her marriage. They moved heaven and earth to make her change her mind, but in vain.

‘As soon as he was married, and in possession of so much wealth, her husband cast off his youthful follies. He devoted himself to his lovely, brilliant, pleasure-seeking wife, and to the management of his property.

‘Their eldest child, a boy, died young, and there only remained to them a little daughter—Mélanie.

‘The mother seems to have been an amiable but frivolous person, a true Pole, passionately devoted to pleasure of all kinds, and especially fond of dancing. They were well known in society, a handsome, brilliant couple ; but the domestic

ménage was not very satisfactory—there were perpetual quarrels and reconciliations. You know the proverb, Olga Petrowna : “ Pole and German—horse and ass !”

‘ Besides, she was capricious and jealous, even to frenzy. She died very young, not quite thirty years old. She quarrelled with her husband at a ball, came out of the heated room flushed with the dance, and stood outside in the bitter cold waiting for the carriage, just to defy him. She then drove home, two hours’ journey, with only a light covering. The next morning she was taken ill, and eight days afterwards this lovely creature, a short time ago full of life and health, was carried to her grave.

‘ Her husband was utterly prostrated by

this blow ; he never recovered from it. He raved in delirium like one insane ; everything was forgotten, even the child. His only passion was the chase. For weeks together he wandered through wood and marsh, his gun upon his shoulder, seeking oblivion. One day, returning home after a long expedition, he was taken ill, and lay down and died, leaving no will behind him.

‘ The Brinskis immediately assumed the guardianship of the child, the heiress, who was about ten years old, and took her to live with them.

‘ Fortunately for the child, her governess, a Swiss, and a most excellent woman, who had brought her up from infancy, was allowed to remain with her and to complete her education.

‘The family had already designed the young heiress for one of their own people, her young cousin, Thaddeus von Brinski—a good-tempered ne’er-do-well. People said that he had agreed to certain conditions in favour of the rest if he married her ; it would indeed have been a shame to allow this splendid property to fall again into the hands of strangers.

‘Cousin Thaddeus soon began to play the amiable to the blooming Mélanie, and the handsome, lively girl is said to have looked with no unfavourable eye upon her gallant relative. All things seemed progressing satisfactorily.

‘But fate had a great disappointment in store for them.

‘Mélanie had attained her eighteenth

year, when the Brinskis received a pressing invitation to Berlin from a near relative, Count Sowitzki, who begged them to honour his wedding with their presence. They gladly accepted, and at the beginning of the year they all went to the Prussian capital.

‘Here Mélanie met, for the first time, Herr von Gleichen. As with her parents, so now with her, they loved at once !

‘An amateur concert was to be given for a charitable purpose, under very high patronage. The young Fräulein von Menghden, a great enthusiast in music, and herself a brilliant performer on the piano-forte, begged her relations to take her to it. The concert took place in the Academy, and they sat in front of the

second circle. Before them were the ladies and gentlemen belonging to the court. Their presence distracted the young girl a little, so that the first pieces fell but coldly on her ear.

‘ Then a lady took her place at the piano, a brilliant blonde, with golden hair, and neck and arms of dazzling whiteness. A whisper ran through the salon, a murmur of applause, which was also partly due to another appearance.

‘ For at this moment a young nobleman, with his violoncello in his hand, stepped to the front, and, with a low bow, took his place. He was tall, somewhat pale, of slender figure, with dark hair, and dark mysterious eyes.

‘ Mélanie felt a strange thrill of emotion

at his appearance—she could not turn her eyes away from him.

““ Ah ! Herr von Gleichen !” she heard one of the ladies in front whisper to her neighbour ; “ he plays exquisitely !”

‘ Mélanie looked at the programme. “ Herr von Gleichen and Frau von Wense.” Meta von Wense, that was then the name of the brilliant beauty at the piano.

‘ A quick glance passed between the performers, and the duet began.

‘ Mélanie sat like one in a dream, a trance of ecstasy. The world, her surroundings, herself, were all forgotten. She had always been fond of the violoncello, it so much resembled the human voice ; but what miserable bungling all previous performances had been !

‘ Oh, those tender, soul-stirring tones—they drew her very heart-strings. Tears stood in her eyes, a smile was on her lips. It seemed to her as if heaven were opened, and angels, descending, sang their sweet notes.

‘ When the piece was ended, and she came to herself, she felt the hot tears rolling down her cheeks, she pressed her hand upon her bosom, and endeavoured to still her emotion.

‘ When she became composed enough to look up, the gentleman with the violoncello had disappeared.

‘ Fortunately no one spoke to her immediately ; she sat there for a time in a confused dream—she heard nothing but those melancholy sweet tones which the charmer

had drawn forth—she saw only those large melancholy eyes fixed upon her.

“Constantine von Gleichen!” her lips murmured involuntarily.

‘From that moment the plan of the Brinskis was overthrown. Cousin Thaddeus, who so gallantly wrapped her mantle round her and led her to the carriage, little thought that this one evening had lost him his rich bride.

‘Fate had decreed, also, that this brilliant violoncellist should be attracted by the young maiden who listened with such rapture. Perhaps her lovely eyes had inspired him to do his best, for on that evening he had even surpassed himself. His heart was passionately agitated, and he already stood in the vestibule, behind a pillar, to

see once more that young stranger-lady, and to learn, if possible, who she was and where she lived.

‘ The fates were propitious.

‘ Cousin Thaddeus himself did him this kind service.

‘ “ Hôtel Meinhard ! ” he called out to the coachman, loud enough for the listener behind the pillar to hear. The next day, at the noonday meal at Meinhard’s hotel, Herr von Gleichen appeared at the *table d’hôte*, and again saw the young lady, looking quite as lovely in the clear light of day as the evening before in the glare of the concert-room.

‘ After that he came every day, and taking his place at a little distance from the object of his adoration, feasted himself in silence upon her looks. From the first

time his appearance had been noticed, and Mélanie's changing colour told him as plainly as words could do what was passing in her heart.

‘The young people soon became acquainted with each other, and it was Cousin Thaddeus again who brought this about. With the courtesy of a gentleman and a Pole, he made advances to Herr von Gleichen, told him of the delight which he had given them all by his playing, drank champagne with him, and was profuse in his compliments. He did not fail to add that his cousin, Mélanie, was almost as perfect a performer upon the piano as he was upon the violin. Herr von Gleichen begged for an introduction, which was immediately effected.

‘Everything followed in due course, quite naturally—visits, invitations, musical re-unions. These two ardent souls were soon drawn together: they discovered each other’s feelings, and their hearts swore eternal love.

‘Well, your Highness, of course there were many long faces when the young lady, as she considered it her duty to do, communicated to her relations the happy event.

‘They stormed and raged, and hastily left Berlin. Thaddeus swore to cut the throat of the miserable violoncellist, or his own, if Mélanie took him. They tried by every means to prevent a marriage so disastrous to them; but as iron hardens under the strokes of the hammer, so their

love became firmer from the obstacles which were placed in its way.

‘To make my story short, Mélanie gave up her claim to a certain territory named Mosciska, worth about a hundred thousand roubles, as they said, which she threw as a morsel to appease the hungry wolves in order to ransom herself. She also paid the debts of Cousin Thaddeus, who, by-the-bye, had neither cut his own nor the other’s throat, but had soothed his injured feelings by indulging to excess in champagne and Rhenish wine.

‘I tell your Highness this to give you a slight sketch of the family to which Mélanie belonged.’

‘*Les grédins ! les misérables !*’ murmured the Princess, angrily.

I continued my story.

‘ In the spring of 18—, they were married. Their life was an intoxication of love—as it were one long kiss ; they revelled in an earthly paradise. They were all in all to each other.

‘ They went for their bridal tour to the Tyrol ; stayed first for some time in the neighbourhood of Innsbruck, and when this place became crowded in the summer, they retired farther up into the mountains. Amidst the grand solitude of nature’s sublimity, they lived in a cottage, far from the roar of the world, alone with themselves and their love.

‘ One would have thought that, according to the law of nature, a reaction must follow, that their first transports would be mode-

rated. But it was not so. In these souls of fire sprang a fountain of love which was inexhaustible.

‘But yet—there is something more dangerous than the relaxation of passion, than the gradual descent from heaven to earth, the returning consciousness that we are but mortals after all, and those wings which we have grown must shrink away from us, and we must again feel the earth under our feet.

‘Their love assumed dimensions ever more critical; it was like a glowing fire, which must at last either consume them or wear itself out.

‘All who were acquainted with Herr von Gleichen and his wife at that time were agreed that there could not have

been a more handsome, brilliant, happy couple than those two. The full sun of happiness seemed to smile on them. Young, beloved, handsome, rich (for Herr von Gleichen also possessed considerable property), courted and fêted in society, what more could life offer them? The horn of plenty had poured its fulness on their heads.

‘But you know, Olga Petrowna, the old Russian proverb: “The devil has a finger in every pie!”

‘As long as they were alone upon the mountains, far from the haunts of men, intoxicated with the first happiness of fulfilled love, the heaven of their union was unshadowed by a single cloud. The long walks through the arched glades of the

forest, arm linked in arm, lip pressed to lip ; the pleasant meals ; the sweet siestas, then the long blissful evenings in a little boat, these two alone rocking on the murmuring waves, on which the mountains cast their deep shadows, and the moonbeams lay like a golden bridge !

‘ But they returned home. They settled in Berlin. They were surrounded by the rush and roar of the world. Friends and acquaintances circled about them. The cup of happiness was dashed from their lips.

‘ Both were ardent natures, and the deep passions which lay within their souls could not be pent up. Each demanded of the other that they should be entirely one, that there should be no wish, no thought, no

feeling, which the other did not share—
l'excès de l'amour.

‘The slightest emotion should be anticipated by eye and lip. How could this be otherwise with two such souls as theirs?’

The Princess nodded. ‘Oh, Nicolas, I understand that!’ she murmured, with half-closed eyes, and looking very anxious. ‘But continue, I am listening.’

‘Well—slight disagreements arose; tears, reproaches followed; the tender complaint in touching tones, “You love me no longer!” came ever more frequently from their lips. Their hearts, too highly strung, felt wounded at the least fluctuation in the atmosphere of affection, called the slightest opposition from the other coldness or obstinacy. Neither could understand how

it was possible to be so hard, so unloving, as not to yield willingly on every point ; to be so cruel as to see the other suffer without immediate surrender. Reconciliation followed, ardent protestations ; the flames of love rose higher than ever. Bathed in tears, they threw themselves into each other's arms, implored forgiveness, renewed vows of love—heart pressed to heart, with smiling lips, happy as two children.

‘ But it was only a pause in the storm !

‘ Ah ! those quarrels, day after day they were renewed. For the merest trifle they were plunged into fire and flame ; the slightest contradiction roused angry feelings, which sprang up at the least touch, like the fiery steed under the spur of his rider.’

The Princess shook her head. ‘ What

they wanted, Nicolas, was a friend, an experienced friend, to open their eyes; they were too young, too *exigéant*—they were killing each other for very love.'

'Fortunately, there was one link to bridge over the abyss which their childish rage had opened, one mutual ground upon which these two passionate hearts could always meet—music.

'Constantine had the deepest feelings of the two; his passion was less visible, but his heart bled inwardly, and the pain had a more lasting effect upon him than upon his lovely young wife, who, more demonstrative, was rendered almost beside herself at the smallest trifle.

'Sometimes the unhappy young husband, weary of this perpetual strife, would retire

to his room in solitude, and take his beloved violin from its case, to soothe his trouble by the melancholy strains which sorrow suggested.

‘Mélanie sits in the room he has left, her burning face buried in her hands, weeping the bitterest tears, sobbing like a child as those sweet tones fall upon her ear. Soft emotions reign in her bosom—she starts up, glides to the door of her husband’s room—upon the threshold she stands a minute listening, with rapt attention—she can see his grave countenance, pale with sorrow, she can tell how he is suffering—he, whom a few minutes ago she had called cruel and cold, suffers for her sake. Her bosom heaves—her eyes sparkle through their veil of tears—she stretches

out her arms to him, and in plaintive tones exclaims :

“ “ Constantine—my beloved !”

‘ She is in his arms, her lips pressed to his, her head upon his breast.

‘ Or he comes to her as she lies upon the sofa, bathed in tears, making herself miserable over a trifle—he speaks to her as to a child, kindly, lovingly—he takes her hand—she tears it away passionately. At last, in despair, he turns to leave her with the reproach : “ You love me no longer !” He has scarcely reached the door when Mélanie’s arms are round his neck, in a passion of remorse and love.’

CHAPTER IX.

JEALOUSY.

‘Oh! what god,
Angry with men, hath sent this strange disease
Into the noblest minds.’



CHAPTER IX.

JEALOUSY.

THE Princess knit her brows, murmuring to herself. She shivered, and drew her shawl closely round her, as if the presage of coming fate was upon her, and then nodded to me to continue.

‘Yes,’ I began afresh; ‘the Baroness was seized with that fatal malady, of which a German poet says :

“Dasz sie mit Eifer sucht, was Leiden schafft !”

‘ Her husband was the sort of man whom women universally admire, tall, slender, elegant—with chiselled features and dark passionate eyes. Before he had a wife, he had been much sought after by the ladies, and with most of them the adoration was not in the least disturbed because he was married.

‘ There were also some hearts—indeed many—which were warmly attached to him, which would gladly have beat against his—for life.

‘ And then—when he drew his magic bow across the strings, eliciting those wonderful tones, had not he power over all hearts?—did not all looks hang entranced upon him? When he ended there was a moment of breathless stillness, broken only

by a slight sound of emotion. Then they crowded round him, almost overwhelming him with effusive praise. Lovely eyes were raised to his, full of enthusiastic admiration.

‘ At first Mélanie saw all this with pride, but soon a feeling of uneasiness arose, and at last the green-eyed monster, jealousy, took possession of her. She was ashamed at first to speak openly—she tried woman’s art.

“ Shall you play this evening ?” she asked coaxingly.

“ They have begged me to do so !”

“ Oh yes, they will always do that. But do you not think, dear Constant, that they go a little too far in their demands ?”

“ How so, Lanie ?”

“ Well, I fancy they invite us more for our talents than for ourselves.”

“ And why not, Lanie ? As Mademoiselle Dutée said : ‘ It gives me so little trouble and affords them so much pleasure,’ ” said he, smiling.

“ Who was Mademoiselle Dutée ?”

“ Oh ! a very lovely young lady ! She lived at the end of the last century, and was guillotined. But she only crossed my mind, dear Lanie—come, give me a kiss !”

‘ He took her in his arms, and she raised to him the ruby chalice of her lips.

“ But, Constant, do not let us play to-night !” she began again, after a pause, watching him furtively from under her long lashes—a true daughter of Eve !

‘ He looked down upon her, his eyes

gazing into hers as if to penetrate their very depths ; at first smilingly, but suddenly with a more serious expression.

“ “ What is the matter, Lanie ? ” he inquired anxiously, as he saw something in her look which appeared strange to him.

‘ Her eyes sank beneath his, and she slightly shrugged her shoulders, like a naughty child.

“ “ It is nothing, Constant — I only thought—— ”

‘ “ Well ! ”

‘ She smiled at him with her lovely, gleaming eyes.

“ “ Do you know — Cousin Thaddeus always said —— ”

“ “ *What* did Cousin Thaddeus always say ? ”

“ “ He called you—a *Bratenbarden* !” she answered hesitatingly, and blushing rosy red.

‘ Her husband laughed merrily till the tears stood in his eyes.

“ “ So you consider me also a *Bratenbarden* ?” he said, highly amused. “ The idea is too good, Lanie ! What a pity I never heard it before !”

‘ He laughed again heartily, and his mirth was so infectious that she at last joined in freely, and kissed him.

“ “ Cousin Thaddeus is an absurd fellow, Lanie ; but I would not do it so cheaply—the bard deserves something more than a slice of roast meat.”

‘ He spoke jestingly, but Mélanie caught up his words, and her face clouded over.

She freed herself from his embrace, and threw a suspicious look upon him.

“ “I can easily believe that,” she said coldly. “And before you were married you could do as you liked, but now you are *my* husband, *I* must have a voice in the matter !”

“ “But, Lanie !” cried he, half-amused and half-astonished, as he laid his hands upon her shoulders and examined her countenance more closely.

‘She was abashed by his gaze, for she felt that her conduct must appear very strange and a little childish. She looked into his true, honest eyes, smiled again, and clung tenderly to him.

“ “Constant !”

“ “What is it, darling ?”

“ “ Do not let us play to-night,” she entreated.

‘ He shook his head in wonder, and a serious expression came over his face.

“ “ You wish it,” he said slowly ; “ very well, so it shall be !”

‘ She danced around him for joy like a child ; she clapped her hands, and kissed his lips and his forehead.

‘ But the husband continued serious and thoughtful. At last she left him and sat herself down in a corner, pouting at what she called his ill-humour.

‘ That evening, to the sorrow of all, there was no music. Constantine von Gleichen excused himself on the plea of headache—his wife had prevailed. But no one dreamed that she was the cause of

that pain, more of the heart than of the head.

‘Mélanie was wise enough to know that such excuses would not last long, and she must find some other means of keeping her husband to herself. She surprised him by the declaration that so much society exhausted and wearied her, that she must not go out much, and when she did, must not play.

‘But, to her horror, she soon found out that her last plan was a mistake, for many others were always ready to supply her place at the piano while her husband played the violin, and especially the captivating young widow, Frau von Wense. However harmless his earlier connection with her might have been, and however

blameless *now*, Mélanie could not look upon it in a Christian spirit.

‘She was tormented with jealousy, she turned pale, her eyes glowed with rage, when she saw the fair widow approach the piano in her stead.

‘She watched her with jealous eyes as she smiled upon her husband—very familiarly, so it seemed to Mélanie—as she stood for a moment in conversation with him, as she coquettishly took off her gloves and drew the glittering bracelets from her lovely white arms, as she once more smiled upon him and then took her place at the instrument.

‘Mélanie was almost frantic with jealous passion. The two played together in a masterly style—but to Mélanie it seemed

only a confused noise. Her brow alone was gloomy, while the faces of all the other listeners beamed with transport. Darker still was her frown, when the piece was over, and every one surrounded the performers, overwhelming them with congratulations. She remained still in her seat, pale as death, almost fainting.

“What is the matter, Lanie?” inquired her husband, terrified at her pale, convulsed features.

“Let us go! I am stifling!” she gasped painfully, as she hastened towards the door.

Her husband followed her.

That evening there was a fearful scene at home. For the first time a new phase in his wife's character was revealed

to 'the shocked gaze of the astonished husband. He had looked down into a volcano.'

CHAPTER X.

THE CLOUD DARKENS.

‘ In aught that from me lures thine eyes,
My jealousy has trial ;
The lightest cloud across the skies
Has darkness for the dial.



CHAPTER X.

THE CLOUD DARKENS.

‘FROM that time Constantine seldom played away from home; when he did so, his wife always accompanied him. The pleasure he had hitherto taken in music was gone.

‘Mélanie herself that evening had been terrified at the rapid growth, the gigantic proportions, of the unhappy passion which had seized her. She went about trembling and ashamed—she tried hard to get the

mastery of herself; but when she sat at the piano again, as usual, to accompany her husband, her eyes glittered ominously, and her gaze wandered suspiciously from the notes, now to her husband, now to the audience.

‘Never had he appeared more handsome in her eyes, never had she loved him more passionately—oh! if those tones had been for herself alone! But when she saw all eyes, especially ladies’, fixed on him with devotion, with enthusiasm, eyes moist with tears—suddenly a wild pang seized her, which she could not overcome in spite of all her struggles.

‘A mist came over her eyes, her hands began to tremble, the notes danced before her, her bosom rose and sank in passion-

ate throbs. Like a whirlwind she dashed her fingers over the keys, rushed on with flying speed until the piece was ended—then rose from the piano, pale as death, with a cold, nervous smile upon her lips.

‘To her husband, playing in this fashion became very unpleasant; sometimes he did not touch his instrument for weeks together. He grew melancholy; upon his brow there gathered a cloud of anxiety. A storm had arisen in the serene heaven of their marriage bliss; a heavy threatening cloud enveloped them in its dark folds.

‘Every day there were quarrels, recriminations, scenes of violent passion; till at last *his* patience gave way, and his sorrow rose to a pitch of morbid sensibility.

‘If the arrow perpetually rankles in the old wound, patience becomes despair.’

The Princess groaned, and said, as she leant back in her easy-chair :

‘How true is the old Russian proverb, Nicolas, “*La cuillerée de goudron finit toujours par tomber dans le tonneau de miel !*”’

‘Their married life was like the stormy ocean, where, without rest or repose, the waves ceaselessly roll on. Now, quick as the lightning-flash, they rear their foam-capped crests in menace—now they mingle in the repose of perfect calm. They fly to each other, they embrace, they are one ; then the inward force severs them, tears them apart ; with menacing roar they lift their heads once more—then again the

strife is over, the wild foaming waters obey the command, "Peace, be still!"

"You do not love me—you have never loved me!" cried Mélanie, when her husband opposed her slightest wish. "Unhappy wretch that I am—he loves me not!" she wailed. Without noticing the troubled face of her husband, she thus goaded him to madness, till he sprang up, pierced to the heart by her bitter reproaches. How could this noble, refined woman have found such evil words, and how could she forget the sufferings she must inevitably bring upon herself?

'How many thousands of times did she make firm resolutions of amendment; how often did she throw herself on her knees in self-accusation before her God! And how

often did he, the young husband, draw her tenderly to his heart with soothing words: "Come, beloved, let us try to forget and forgive. We love one another indeed—we would so gladly see each other happy. Let us avoid strife—else we both go to ruin."

‘Yes, they did indeed go to ruin, Olga Petrowna! Had Heaven but sent them a child, it would have been a link between them—but no . . .

‘One night they had been in society, and Mélanie thought she had cause for jealousy—she raved and stormed. Her husband remonstrated kindly with her, but at last he also became excited, and returned reproach for reproach. After this outburst, he composed himself again, and remained quite still, making no reply to her bitter

taunts. This apparent indifference rendered the passionate girl almost beside herself with rage; she loaded him with insults; she charged him with having deceived her. He was a coward—dishonourable—worse than a murderer. A murderer killed his victim at one blow, he destroyed her slowly, pang by pang. So far did her ungovernable temper carry her.

‘Then, to her astonishment, her husband rose slowly, took his cloak, and, without a word, left her and went out, though it was the middle of winter.

‘For a moment she was speechless—brought back to her right senses. She sat and gazed after him—she listened. Everything was still—she heard nothing but the beating of her own heart.

“Constant!” she cried . . . “Constant, you will freeze to death!” in accents, at first commanding, then softening into entreaty.

‘But no answer came—all was still.

‘A terrible fear seized the young wife; her cheeks glowed with fire, and her heart was heavy as lead.

“Constant!” she cried once more, in tones of despair.

‘Still no reply.

‘The next moment she sprang from her couch and glided towards the door—she opened it gently and looked out—all was dark, no sound was heard. With trembling hands she found the box of matches upon the stove, and lit a taper.

‘There lay her husband upon a couch,

in that icy room, wrapped only in his cloak, his features distorted with pain.

‘She forgot that she herself was standing with bare feet, in thin night attire—she thought only of him. She threw herself on her knees by his side, and seized his hand.

‘He did not move—he knitted his dark brows, and drew his hand angrily away.

‘Full of remorse and despair, she cried once more :

“Constant, I beg your forgiveness—I have done you wrong.”

‘He gazed at her with a strange look, which pierced her inmost soul.

‘Then, for the first time, he noticed how thinly clad she was, while without the snow

was falling ; a light gleamed in his eye, and he breathed heavily.

‘ In stern tones he said : “ Go back and sleep ! ”

‘ She looked at him mournfully, and shook her head.

“ “ Forgive me, Constant ! ”

“ “ Go back and sleep ! ” he reiterated angrily. “ You will catch your death of cold, unhappy woman ! ”

“ “ Forgive me first, I pray you,” she implored, with a burst of tears.

‘ Without a word he sprang up, seized his wife in his strong arms, and carried her back to her room. She remained still as a mouse in his embrace, murmuring in his ear :

““Forgive . . . forgive!” while the hot tears fell upon his neck.

‘He laid her down upon her pillow—she held him fast.

““Forgive me, Constant!” she pleaded.

‘And . . . poor fool—he forgave her.’

CHAPTER XI.

THE SEPARATION.

‘To be angry with those we love
Doth work like madness on the brain.’

‘I only know we loved in vain,
I only feel Farewell ! farewell !’



CHAPTER XI.

THE SEPARATION.

‘IT is written somewhere in the Bible that when the devil is driven out of a man, and has returned to him again, he brings with him a dozen of his fellows, and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

‘For a short time peace reigned—then the storm broke out afresh. One day they were sitting at table, when Mélanie made a sarcastic remark about Frau von Wense, which Constantine resented, and defended

the unjustly accused lady. On this a perfect hurricane arose, the vials of wrath were poured upon his head.

‘Her eyes flashing with anger, in a paroxysm of passion, Mélanie so far forgot herself as to throw the knife she held in her hand at her husband. It struck him on the cheek, just below the eye—the blood streamed down his face.

‘Mélanie became pale with horror, she uttered an inarticulate cry—her knees trembled—she could not move.

‘Her husband cast upon her one reproachful look, without a word drew the knife from the wound while the blood poured forth in a stream, held his handkerchief firmly to his face, and with gloomy brow, still in silence, turned to go.

‘She stood there, a picture of grief and terror, her hands clasped, her eyes dilated . . . horrified at herself and her wicked deed. She strove in vain for words . . . she could not speak.

‘Constantine’s glance fell upon his unhappy wife, speechless from terror and remorse — anger left him, his heart was moved with pity—he stepped towards her, put his arm round her, and drew her gently to his heart.

“‘Come, Lanie, never mind,” he said tenderly, kissing her upon the forehead ; “do not trouble about it.”

‘But she remained motionless, an icy numbness seemed to paralyse her frame.

‘Constantine pitied her from the depths of his soul ; he knew what was passing in

that wayward heart, and felt deep compassion for the lovely, unhappy being, a slave to her own passions. Perhaps, too, he was glad that a crisis had come, that she could see with her own eyes to what a crime uncontrolled anger might lead her. The pain of his wound was forgotten, as he witnessed her silent agony. It might be a warning to her—there might be hope for the future.

‘With one hand pressed to his cheek, he held her firmly embraced with the other.

“‘Lanie, my poor child,” he said, kissing her, “have you terrified yourself so much? Come, be a brave woman—it is but a trifle, a scratch of the skin, nothing more.”

‘Some time elapsed before his wife recovered her senses, before her eyes lost

their rigid expression, before tears came to her relief.

‘ Ah, then, how she sobbed—how she accused herself—how she bewailed her evil temper—how she threw herself at her husband’s feet and vowed amendment !

‘ He raised her from the ground and tried to comfort her.

‘ But Mélanie *would* not be comforted—she was overwhelmed with shame and horror. One inch farther, and the knife would have entered his eye—she might have killed him.

‘ And he—what an angel of goodness he was . . . to forgive her all so nobly ! Never had she loved him so much, never had she seemed more despicable in her own eyes.

‘ Three months passed away ; she became

pale and thin—her spirits were quite broken. She suffered agonies—she was perpetually on guard against herself, against her passionate temper—she almost sank under the effort of continual suppression.

‘The Baron became very anxious at the sight of his wife’s sad, pale face, and he took her away to Baden-Baden for a change of scene. Here, in the lovely country and glorious air, Mélanie seemed to revive; the colour came back to her cheeks, and her spirits recovered their lively tone. The load of care fell from her husband; all seemed going on well; he believed her to be quite cured.

‘But no—he rejoiced too soon. Poor fellow, the fates were against him.

‘One day, when they were walking arm-

in-arm along the gay street, an open carriage met them. Two ladies sat in it, one of them a blonde of rare beauty, who uttered a joyful cry when she saw them, and ordered the coachman to stop.

‘It was Frau von Wense.

‘The greeting was to all appearance most cordial, even on Mélanie’s side ; but there was a strange gleam in her eyes, which boded disaster.

‘From that hour all was changed. The evil demon again took possession of Mélanie’s soul.

‘Passion she could conquer ; jealousy, never.

‘All barriers were broken down ; the waters overflowed ; chaos had come.

‘After a few days Mélanie, with gloomy

brow and compressed lips, came to her husband, and asked him to leave Baden-Baden. When he remonstrated with her, she answered coldly :

“ “Very well, you stay here—I will go alone.”

‘ With face deadly pale, but preserving his calmness, he answered, with equal coldness :

“ “So be it ; we will go.”

“ “Oh, do not disturb yourself for my sake,” she burst forth, as she saw how he was moved ; “but—it seems to me—that we are only a burden to one another. We make ourselves wretched—we torment each other to death !”

‘ And then fell from her lips, for the first time, the fatal words :

“We should do better, under these circumstances, to separate.”

‘In her passion she scarcely knew what she said.

‘Her husband gazed at her for a moment with a grave, serious expression, and then went out without answering a word. She had given him a deadly blow.

‘They left the place ; she, glad at heart—he, pale and wretched.

‘Unhappy, suspicious wife ! As his sadness continued, she took it into her head that he was angry because she had separated him from Frau von Wense ; she brooded over her wrongs, and fanned the flame of jealousy that was consuming her.

‘Day after day the misery increased.

During the long, sleepless nights, his thoughts ran thus :

“ ‘She is right—our life is wretched. Can we love each other, if the result is only unhappiness? Can this be true love? Love bears all, endures all, is patient through all. Would it not be best—would it not be right—even a duty—to give Mélanie back her freedom? Is she not wretched with me? Great God of mercy! what shall I do? Give me Thy counsel—what shall I do?’ ”

‘He was in a dangerous frame of mind.

‘Mélanie, blinded by jealousy and evil temper, took offence at every syllable he uttered, at everything he did. The fatal word—separation—came again and again from her lips.

“ “You are right, M^élanie,” answered her husband one evening, with brow full of care, and lips quivering with pain ; “ it *is* sinful. Our life is a mistake—every day it becomes worse between us—I see no other course. We are so far sundered that we can never be the same to one another again. It shall be as you wish—we will separate !”

‘ He stood before her with a grave countenance, his brows knit together, his arms crossed upon his breast.

‘ She looked at him, turned pale and red by turns, then rose quickly and went out. The door closed behind her, she shut herself in her own room. For several days they did not meet. How inexpressibly they both suffered !

‘They did not separate immediately, Olga Petrowna ; they had several more quarrels and reconciliations. But at last, after one fearful scene, Mélanie, weeping bitterly, packed up a few things secretly in the night, and the next morning was gone.

‘She wrote to her husband from her first stopping-place, saying that she saw they could not live together. She would not be guilty of the sin of making his whole life unhappy, therefore she renounced all claim upon him, and was on her way to her own relations.’

‘*Une folle ! Grand Dieu !*’ groaned the Princess. ‘Had she no friend near her, no kind soul who could warn her ? No one ? Poor child ! And he, poor fellow,

for he loved her, Nicolas, and—she had left him !

‘ It was a fearful blow for Constantine. It seemed like some terrible dream. Mélanie gone—he could not realise it. He knew that in her heart she loved him, tenderly, passionately—that even the continual strife was only the result of excessive, ill-regulated love ; how was it possible that she could have left him ? But yet—it was true—she was really gone.

‘ Three, four days passed, and she did not return. Every hour he was on the point of hastening after her. But if she were to repulse him—to persist in her resolution—what then ? It was too soon yet ; he must let her blind folly run its course. She loved him, her heart was

noble and good ; surely, when this paroxysm was over, she would return to him of her own accord.

‘ He wrote to her—a long, touching letter. He waited and waited, with ever-increasing anxiety, but he received no answer—not one line.’

The Princess raised herself in astonishment.

‘ He wrote again and again ; he begged, he implored her to return, with the most touching entreaties—still no reply. Then, at last, one day he received a letter ; it bore the postmark of a little place in the neighbourhood of Kowno, near her estates. He knew the writing very well, the pointed, crabbed hand of Mélanie’s uncle.

‘ With trembling hands the injured hus-

band broke the seal—hot tears stood in his eyes—a cry of pain and anger escaped his lips—there was not one line from Mélanie.

‘He read the letter. The uncle, good man, was courtesy and sympathy itself. He spoke first of Mélanie’s passionate character, which had always flamed up at the smallest trifle, and then as suddenly subsided ; next, of the deep anxiety which had already been caused by this cardinal failing, to the eradication of which the whole of her earlier education in his house had been directed in vain.

‘He went on to deplore the haste with which the Baron, attracted by Mélanie’s charms, had married her against the wish of her relatives, without knowing a little more of her ardent nature. In the intoxi-

cation of passion many things had been done which in cooler moments would have been avoided. Their youth and ardour might plead as their excuse, but could not shift the consequences upon others.

‘The Baron must remember that no blame could be attached to him or his wife ; they had both seriously dissuaded Mélanie from the step, for, not to mention that it would have pleased them much better had she married one of their own people, a man of more practical character (the Baron would pardon him), they had almost with certainty predicted how it would be—that both parties must be unhappy—their characters were utterly unsuited to one another. The result unfortunately justified their fears.

‘ His niece had arrived at their house quite unexpectedly, in an indescribable state of agitation, but yet firmly resolved to free herself from a bond which must, she clearly affirmed, at last bring both to destruction.

‘ His letters only agitated Mélanie, without in the slightest degree altering her determination. And he himself, though he would desire to remain neutral in such a painful matter, could, after much consideration, only agree with her. For both parties it would be the only right course.

‘ He therefore begged the Baron to familiarise himself gradually with the idea ; to consider that it would be altogether impossible, after the step his niece had taken, for them to live together again.

‘He requested, nay, he demanded of him before all things, to write no more to Mélanie. She herself made the same petition, for his letters only excited her, injured her already shattered health, without—and that he must positively affirm—altering her resolution, which was as firm as a rock.

‘These were the contents of the letter.

‘One can imagine what a crushing effect this had upon a heart so sensitive, so deeply wounded as Constantine’s.

‘Desolate, saddened, broken-hearted, he passed the next few days as though in a frightful dream. So even his letters were returned coldly ; she allowed her uncle to write—a third person—a stranger—almost

an enemy. It was not mere defiance—no—it was hardness of heart!

‘And he had fondly imagined that she loved him—loved him even now! Ah! and he—how much he loved her—loved her still, in spite of all.

‘After some time he took his resolution. He would see Mélanie once more, would speak to her himself, would hear from her own lips the fatal word that should part them for ever.

‘He threw himself on horseback, and journeyed for three days and three nights towards Kowno. Only a few miles now separated him from his wife. From this place he sent her a letter containing all that would suggest itself to a noble, loving, self-denying heart in such a position. The last words were :

“ I am here—speak but the word, and I am at your feet. All shall be forgiven and forgotten !”

‘ In a state of feverish agitation he waited for an answer ; life or death depended upon it.

‘ The uncle himself arrived.

‘ With an angry countenance he entered the room where the Baron was sitting.

“ In Heaven’s name, what have you done ?” were his first words. “ Did you not receive my letter, or did you think I spoke to the winds ? Come with me and look upon your work. I will listen to no vindication. I insist, Herr nephew, that you come with me and see with your own eyes the mischief your fatal letters have

wrought! God grant that Mélanie may recover!"

'He pushed the wretched young man into his carriage, almost stunned with despair, and they drove off rapidly to his estate.

'There the Baron saw Mélanie again.

'She lay on her bed, dangerously ill, a prey to the wildest ravings of delirium.

'Her aunt, the doctor, and a sister of mercy stood around her couch, with anxious, tear-stained faces.

"See what you have done!" whispered the uncle in his ear, passing his hand across his eyes. "That is your work, Herr Nephew!"

'The women turned upon him their

tearful, reproachful looks ; the doctor took him aside and appealed to him.

‘ At last Cousin Thaddeus, out of compassion, led the half-dead, heart-broken husband back to Kowno, promising to keep him informed of his wife’s condition.

‘ He remained there for a whole month in a state of the deepest misery, and then, when Thaddeus had informed him that Mélanie was out of danger, he returned to Berlin, crushed—broken down—a misanthrope !

‘ The uncle hastened on the separation in Mélanie’s name. He met with no difficulties. The Baron agreed to everything ; he only made one condition, that he must see his wife’s signature before putting his own name to the document.

‘ Poor man, he little knew the excellent uncle !

‘ He saw the signature—it was genuine—he added his own.

‘ Thus were these two parted.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE WEB OF TREACHERY.

‘A man may smile and smile,
And be a villain.’

‘She only said : “My life is dreary ;
He cometh not,” she said.’

.



CHAPTER XII.

THE WEB OF TREACHERY.

THE Princess sighed deeply.

‘But, Nicolas, the Baroness — how could she be so hard-hearted as to destroy herself and her husband too?’

‘Ah, Princess, it was a villanous plot on the part of her relations. This is Mélanie’s story :

‘She left him, as I have already related, in defiance and anger ; she wanted to make him feel her loss. Her unhappy nature

craved for scenes, for demonstrations—quiet domestic love palled upon her. But she was no sooner gone than she repented. She waited a whole day at Berlin, hoping that he would hasten after her, would fall at her feet, and she—she would then forgive him.

‘ But when night came and he appeared not, with lowering brow she commanded her maid to prepare for departure. In blind obstinacy she set out on her journey to her relations; to know that she was with them would give additional pain to her husband.

‘ She arrived there after a long, troublesome journey, worn out with fatigue; the remembrance of her husband's love, the stings of her guilty conscience, had brought

her into a highly nervous state of exhaustion and agitation.

‘She waited hourly, with ever-increasing anguish, in expectation of seeing her husband, or receiving a letter—if only one line—from him. She pined for reconciliation, but nothing, nothing came.

‘The greedy relations received the infatuated girl with open arms. They overwhelmed her with hypocritical sympathy, with false compassion ; they mourned over her, and spoke of happiness, of content.

‘So passed many fearful days for Mélanie.

‘She had left him—she had injured, tortured him. Oh how bitterly she now repented ! how she longed after him—

pined for one kind word—one look—one kiss! Ah! how devotedly she loved him now! How inexpressibly dear he was to her now!

‘Had she not been quite sure that Constantine *would* come after her—*must* come, she would have gone back at once in search of him, to implore his pardon, to promise amendment, to tell him how much she loved him.

‘Of his many letters she received not a single one.

‘At last she wrote to him, poured out her soul in a torrent of self-reproach, of deep sorrow and repentance. She was sure it only needed one word from her, and Constantine would forgive all and hasten to her side.

‘ She waited from day to day.

‘ He did not come—not one line reached her.

‘ Mélanie now became almost distracted—she wrote again and again.

‘ Still no word from him—no sign of life.

‘ It seemed as if he were dead.

‘ She was now painfully convinced that Constantine would not see her, would not write to her—that he had cast her off for ever.

‘ She was now bent upon starting off to seek him, to see him with her own eyes, to plead with her own voice; but her relations would not allow her to depart, and the doctor strictly forbade it.

‘ For a new bright gleam of hope had

risen before her. In a delirium of ecstasy mingled with pain, she discovered what to women who love their husbands bestows on them such unmixed happiness.'

The Princess looked up inquiringly.

'That she was about to become a mother.

'With trembling hands she wrote the news to her husband, and lost herself in golden dreams of anticipation, counting the days and hours that must elapse before he could be with her.

'She amused herself by thinking how the news would surprise the obstinate man ; how happy and at the same time how ashamed he would be ; how he would rejoice, and immediately hasten to her on the wings of love !

‘ Ah ! how could she think otherwise !

‘ But, unhappy creature, she hoped and waited in vain.

‘ Her husband came not—he came not—not even now. He wrote not a word. Terrible thoughts distracted her soul. He had never loved her—he was glad to be free, rid of a burden.

‘ The blow was too heavy for Mélanie to bear. Her mind and her body alike gave way ; she became dangerously ill. She lay for days together, without consciousness, in the wild delirium of fever, at the point of death.

‘ And in that state her husband saw her.

‘ The scene was well arranged. That

illness happened most opportunely for her relations.'

'Abominable wretches!' cried the Princess, with an impetuous movement.

'Yes, dear Princess, they were wretches indeed.

'The uncle, striving by every means in his power to obtain the control of his niece's property, had systematically intercepted the correspondence between these unhappy young people. Every letter passed into his hands, and was quietly consigned to the flames. He was determined that this union, so fatal to his interests, should be brought to an end. The marriage must be dissolved, and he set himself to do it.

‘Mélanie recovered at last, and they then began to talk to her, to appeal to her pride, to tell her it was due to herself to press for a judicial separation. They worked also upon her feelings; it was not only a duty to herself, but also to her husband. She must set him free; she must not wait until he demanded it of her. Her honour, her reputation were at stake.

‘Poor Mélanie! At her wits’ end with remorse and despair, she at last consented—she set him free.’

‘But, good heavens, Nicolas! why did not the woman start off even then to her husband—demand an interview with him—tell him of her sorrow and her repentance?’

‘So she would have done even now for her child’s sake, as well as her own, had not those wicked relations stood in the way. They had craft enough to hinder any approach to reconciliation ; and then, remember, Mélanie was quite broken down with pain and grief, powerless in their hands.

‘Everything was as they wished—the separation was complete.

‘So those two were parted, separated for all time, torn asunder by wicked men, who sought to gain benefit to themselves from the misery they had caused.

‘But their plans only partially succeeded.

‘Cousin Thaddeus in vain attempted once more to ingratiate himself with the

widowed Mélanie. In vain he swore again and again to take away his life ; the Baroness was not to be persuaded into a second marriage. She lived now only for her child, the little Nina, cherishing the remembrances of past joys.

‘At last she married the Baron von Maszmann, to save her child from being plundered by her own relations. The veil had fallen from her eyes ; she saw them in their true character, and learnt at last how shamefully they had acted towards her. But the enlightening came too late !’

At this moment I felt a little hand upon my shoulder. I started in surprise and looked up. The Countess d’Alois stood behind me, ready dressed for going out.

‘I must beg that this conversation be

postponed to some other time—the carriage has been waiting for half an hour,’ she said, smiling.

I, absorbed in my story, and the Princess, listening with closed eyes, had not noticed her approach.

‘Another time,’ murmured Olga Petrowna, giving me her hand. ‘*Au revoir, mon ami*: thank you very much!’

I conducted the ladies to their carriage, and then threw myself into another to return to Hélène. Time had passed so quickly during my narrative, that it had become quite late.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING.

‘Love shall be purified by pain,
And pain be soothed by love again.’



CHAPTER XIII.

THE CLOUD WITH THE SILVER LINING.

ONE day we all drove to the Palazzo Pitti, to see the magnificent treasures which it contains.

After a time the Princess beckoned to me.

‘The air of these rooms stifles me,’ she said, fanning herself. Take me into the garden, Nicolas; the sun has gone down, and I think it will be very pleasant.’

We descended the broad steps, and were

soon lost amid the leafy foliage of one of the many beautiful shaded walks. We reached an elevated spot near the fountain, from which we could enjoy one of the most magnificent views in the world.

We sat down upon a grassy bank, and for some moments gazed silently out into the far distance.

Suddenly the Princess turned to me.

‘I should like to hear the rest of the story, Nicolas, and to learn how those two unhappy creatures came to meet at W——.’

I continued my narrative.

‘The poor Baron, as I already informed your Highness, was utterly prostrate, broken down, a divorced man, separated from the wife whom he still passionately loved. His reason tottered upon its

throne. His country became hateful to him ; he suddenly disappeared.

‘ He sold all his property, and sailed for America : there he had an estate in Louisiana, on which he took up his residence. Here, almost without care, he soon amassed an enormous fortune. But all the treasures in the world could not make him forget his wife. He became utterly broken in health ; he was consumed by sorrow and unfulfilled longing. The physicians ordered him to Europe, and he went, first to Carlsbad, and then to W——. Never, during those long years, had he heard one word of Mélanie.

‘ But here fate brought him and his wife once more together.’

The Princess interrupted. ‘ Nicolas,’

she said, almost in a whisper, 'this is a very extraordinary and touching story.'

'You are right, Olga Petrowna; shall I finish the tale?'

'Yes; go on, Nicolas.'

'Your Highness will remember that in W——, at that time, there was a stranger, eccentric in look and manner. He had sometimes spoken to little Nina in the street. As the governess informed us afterwards, at the first sight of the child he suddenly stood still, as if petrified, while a look, almost of terror, flitted across his stern features. At first he only asked her name; the child told him she was called Nina von Maszmann. Her name was really Constantia, which had been shortened into Nina.'

‘It was very strange. The child at first was much terrified at the dark, gloomy man with the long black beard, but after a time she ran to him with delight whenever she saw him.

‘As strange, also, was the touching expression with which he would sometimes fix his deep melancholy eyes upon the child, as though wrapped in painful reflection.

‘He lived a strange, melancholy life at W——, spoke to no one, had no doctor, although evidently a sufferer, and took long solitary walks. Even in such a curious little place as W——, he would hardly have been noticed, had there not been something striking in his tall, bent figure, his yellow, haggard countenance,

with hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, and wild tangled beard.

‘The people with whom he lodged had at first somewhat feared this grave tenant, but in time became attracted to him, on account of his gentle, unassuming manners. They said so afterwards to the Frau von Baniutin, when all was over, when the Baron von Maszmann had gone to his grave. Those long walks and his music—the violoncello, you know--were his only pleasures.

‘Good Frau Köhler said herself, she was not a little astonished, and very pleased, when one morning he commissioned her to procure him a ticket for “*Il Trovatore*.”

‘There, in the theatre, they met again. Fate had brought them together.

‘In a box opposite to him was seated a young, lovely creature, with a sad, sorrowful expression of countenance. There she sat, surrounded by brightness and splendour.

‘By chance his eyes fell upon her—his blood stagnated—his heart stopped beating. He raised himself from his seat—his gaze was fixed upon that form—his eyes almost started from their sockets—an indescribable tremor agitated his whole frame.

‘Was it possible? Yes, it was she—without doubt—his wife—Mélanie.

‘He became as pale as death, uttered an inarticulate cry, and fell into a swoon.

‘That cry was heard through the whole house, and reached the ear of the Baroness. She looked up and saw a man, in a box

opposite, fall back in a fainting fit—a stranger.

‘Such a scene in a theatre always causes a sensation, and the nerves of the lady were strangely excited. They carried the unconscious man out; the strains of music filled the house, but that cry was sounding in her ears; it seemed as if a chord had been suddenly struck in her bosom, and was still vibrating there—a tone which drew her very heart-strings. Music and spectators, light and brightness, disappeared from before her eyes; she saw only that pale, haggard face, she heard only that mournful cry.

‘For a while she sat thus lost in reflection; then, all at once, a cold shiver came over her—she turned suddenly pale

—her eyes gleamed with an unnatural brightness. All became dark, a rushing sound came in her ears; with a strong effort she kept herself from fainting.

““You are unwell, gracious lady?” said a compassionate voice.

““It is nothing—it is nothing,” she replied, and endeavoured to compose herself.

‘Fortunately, at this moment the curtain fell.

‘She hastened out, declining all assistance. While waiting for her carriage, at the entrance to the theatre, she inquired after the stranger who had fainted. They told her he was an American, a Mr. Constantine Williams; he had already been taken in a carriage to his apartments, No. 4, Garden Road.

‘In a state of extreme agitation she reached her home.

“Constantine Williams!—Constantine! Good God! it was he!”

‘A cry of pain escaped her. She saw again that pale countenance, like a dead man.

‘Was that her handsome husband, her dearly-loved Constantine? Was it possible? Was that all that remained of his former self? Or was she deceived by a dream—a fancied resemblance?

‘No, no! A voice within her cried loudly :

“It is he—it is he—the loved one—my husband—and he is miserable!”

‘A thought shot through her mind.

‘He had seen her—yes, it was certain.

The whole scene came back to her—he had seen her—had recognised her. It must have been the sight of her that had caused this fainting fit ; he had experienced the same emotions at the unexpected meeting as she was now feeling, and it had overcome him.

‘ The hot tears flowed from her eyes.

“ Merciful Heaven ! is it possible ? ” she cried aloud.

‘ All the harm that he had done her, all, all was forgotten in a moment. The fountains of her heart were opened ; a flood of compassion, of love gushed forth.

“ I must have certainty—I must see him ! ” she cried, wringing her hands, and

walking with hasty steps up and down the room.

‘A thousand remembrances, a thousand varied feelings, agitated her soul. The iron band which for years had lain upon her heart was loosed at last. She breathed—she lived again—she hoped.

‘To him — to him! was her only thought.

‘Impulsive, loving woman, she forget everything else.

‘Hastily throwing on a cloak and veil, she inquired the way to Garden Road, and proceeded there as fast as her feet could carry her. As she approached the house, she saw lights in the rooms above, and shadows moving to and fro. In the confusion the door had been left open; she entered.

‘Step by step she slowly ascended the stairs, no one saw her.

‘Upon the landing above a small lamp burned dimly, and a bright gleam shone through an open doorway.

‘Breathlessly she approached — she looked in—there—there upon the sofa lay a pale form—by his side two women were occupied in restoring consciousness. The light fell clearly upon his emaciated features. Her hands convulsively clasped the door-post ; she swayed like a willow in the storm.

“ ‘Yes—there was no further doubt—it was her husband, Constantine—no stranger—no Mr. Williams.”

‘Ah ! the eyes of love cannot be deceived !

“ ‘ Merciful God ! how he had changed in these few years.’ ”

‘ A flood of tears burst from her eyes.

‘ Her dear husband—her heart’s best beloved—the father of her child, Nina. Ah ! how she had tormented him, and then left him in anger !

‘ These thoughts fell like coals of fire upon her soul. Had not she herself been guilty through all ? Now that she had been purified by pain, she saw plainly that she, she alone, had been the cause of all the terrible unhappiness. Ever heavier grew the burden which pressed upon her heart, and weighed her down with insupportable anguish, crushing her very soul !

‘ The servant came out and went past

her ; then followed the elder woman, who shut the door, and began to descend the stairs.

‘ Mélanie summoned up her courage and hastened after her ; it had suddenly occurred to her that Madame Köhler had told the servant to fetch a doctor.

“ “ Do not send for any one,” said the trembling woman, ‘ let me nurse the sick man, I am a distant relation of his.”

‘ Frau Köhler gazed at her with astonishment ; whence had sprung this suddenly-discovered relation ; how had she entered the house ? But the lady looked so respectable, her language and manners were so evidently those of a distinguished person that her suspicions were allayed. Glad to have some assistance, some one

who would relieve her of the responsibility she let her do as she liked.

‘Mélanie went back and softly entered the room.

‘The invalid sat there upon his sofa, meditating, his hands clasped over his aching brow. He did not immediately perceive her, and she had time to notice his dejected attitude, to see that wasted hand, on which gleamed one solitary ring, the ring which she herself had given him on the day when she told him that she—that she would be his wife.

‘A tumult of indescribable feelings passed through Mélanie’s soul. Was it so indeed? Did he love her still—had he loved her all these years—still wore her ring?

‘ One sob, one sigh of pain rose to her trembling lips from her overcharged heart.

‘ The sick man looked up, and gazed in surprise at that tall strange form.

‘ Then suddenly her veil fell—he saw Mélanie—his wife—bathed in tears—her arms longingly outstretched to him—his name upon her lips.

‘ “ Constantine !”

‘ “ Mélanie !”

‘ Ah ! what pen can describe that scene !

* * * * *

‘ Joy did not kill him, but the present happiness could not blot out the traces which years of sorrow had marked upon his frame.

‘They had found each other again, these two forsaken desolate souls—like two solitary stars which, lost for a time in illimitable space, had now again become one.

‘After the first blissful moments came mutual explanations.

‘Ah ! what a revelation it was !

‘The rest you know, Olga Petrowna.’

The Princess looked at me for a moment in silence, and then said :

‘But, Nicolas, I do not understand, tell me what happened afterwards at W——. Why did not the Baroness disclose all to her second husband ; he was a noble, generous, kind-hearted man, she might have trusted him. Why did she let matters come to such a fearful pass ?’

I slightly shrugged my shoulders.

‘She certainly had no intention of deceiving him, but then, your Highness, the situation was very delicate, and both Mélanie and Herr von Gleichen shrank from the communication.

‘After that first interview and explanation, they found, upon calm reflection, that a knot had been tied by fate and by man which appeared indissoluble.

‘Mélanie was in a fearful position ; she had now two husbands—the one the beloved, the newly-regained, the father of her child, the man of her heart, her own before God and herself—and then the other, the fatherly friend, who loved and protected her, to whom she owed so much, her husband by the laws of man.

‘ She had only just found him again, her true husband ; he was so ill, so miserable, and all through her.

‘ And for herself—poor wife ! She had been unhappy for so long, she wished to temporise ; she sought to gain time, to consider what she should do. Perhaps, also, she forgot everything else, for a little while, in the enjoyment of the great bliss of having him to herself alone, of tending him undisturbed.

‘ Unhappy lady ! She had to tell him of the birth of the dear little Nina, his own child ; and then, her heart torn with conflicting emotions, she had to confess the dreadful news that she had entered upon a second marriage—had another husband.

‘ Her difficulty also in disclosing all to Baron von Maszmann was increased, because, with woman’s instinct, she must long since have divined what was passing in his heart, in spite of all his caution—that the fountain so long dried up had at last begun to flow—that he loved her with the whole power of his mature years.

‘ So she put it off from day to day until it was too late. She lived in a continual state of agitation, this double existence was wearing her life away, and yet she still delayed. But, meanwhile, other agents were at work, wicked tongues were whispering in her husband’s ear.

‘ One evening, as she sat by the sick man’s couch, reading to him, the door suddenly opened—a tall dark figure entered—

the fur cloak fell back — her husband, Baron von Maszmann, stood before her—pale as death—the deadly weapon in his hand.

‘ In dread terror she threw herself before the beloved one, sheltering his body with her own.

“ ‘ Wife ! wife ! ” exclaimed the unhappy man, raising his hand—then suddenly the pistol slipped from his grasp—there was a shot, a report—and, mortally wounded, the Baron fell to the ground.

‘ All was the work of a moment, so sudden, so unexpected. Before she could collect herself, could look up, all was over.

‘ Baron von Maszmann lay upon the floor, weltering in his blood.

The Princess and myself sat for some

time lost in thought. The bees hummed around us, the wind softly rustled the leaves over our heads, a lovely butterfly flew from flower to flower.

‘That shot, Nicolas,’ began the Princess suddenly, ‘was a happiness for all three, one might almost say a work of Providence. Thank you, my friend, let us go now, Hélène will miss you.’

We turned down the broad terrace towards the palace ; we saw a little group entering the garden through the trellis ; they beckoned to us as they approached. It was the Countess with Hélène, and the Baron with Mélanie, walking arm-in-arm, the little Nina between them.

The Princess acknowledged the greeting and then turned to me.

‘You see yourself, Nicolas, how happy these two are together after all the trials that heaven has sent them. Who knows if they would ever have been so happy without them,’ she said, with tears in her eyes.

She smiled and stepped towards Mélanie. She embraced her with great affection, and, a rare thing for the Princess to do, kissed her on both cheeks.

‘You have a charming wife,’ she then said, turning to the Baron. ‘I love her as my own daughter.’

Hélène looked at me and pressed my hand.

THE END.

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